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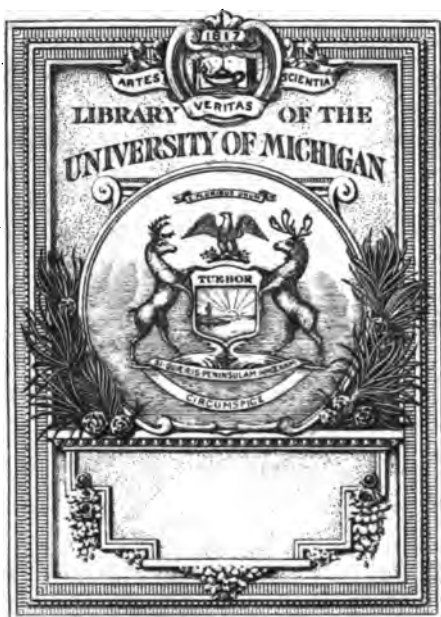
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April 1899

Virtue leads in the paths of peace





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John Jones

virtue leads in the paths of peace



Christianity Unveiled;

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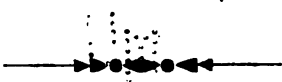
THE PRINCIPLES AND EFFECTS

OF THE

Christian Religion.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF BOULANGER,

By W. M. JOHNSON.



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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

IN this philosophic age, when nature, reason, and the rights of man have resumed their empire; when the genius of a great, generous, and brave people is giving the last blow to superstition and despotism, the publication of a work which has greatly contributed to these glorious events, must be highly acceptable, not only to the literary world, but even to the community at large, who eagerly seek after instruction, the moment they believe it necessary for their happiness.

This publication bears a conspicuous rank among those works whose free and independent sentiments have introduced a happy change in the public mind, and concurred with the writings of Rousseau, Mably, Raynal, and Voltaire, in bringing forward the French Revolution: a revolution which will probably prove the harbinger of the complete triumph of reason. Persecutions and wars will then cease for ever throughout the civilized world.

In offering this translation to the public, I pay a tribute that every member of society owes to his fellow-citizens, that of endeavouring to acquaint them with their true rights and duties, and, consequently, the means most conducive to their happiness.

New York, 1804.



A
LETTER

FROM

THE AUTHOR TO A FRIEND.

I RECEIVE, Sir, with gratitude, the remarks which you send me upon my work. If I am sensible to the praises you condescend to give it, I am too fond of truth to be displeased with the frankness with which you propose your objections. I find them sufficiently weighty to merit all my attention. He but ill deserves the title of philosopher, who has not the courage to hear his opinions contradicted. We are not divines; our disputes are of a nature to terminate amicably; they in no way resemble those of the apostles of superstition, who endeavour to overreach each other by captious arguments, and who, at the expence of good faith, contend only to advocate the cause of their vanity and their prejudices. We both desire the happiness of mankind, we both search after truth; this being the case, we cannot disagree.

You begin by admitting the necessity of examining religion, and submitting opinions to the decision of reason. You acknowledge that Christianity cannot sustain this trial, and that in the eye of good sense it can never appear to be any thing but a tissue of absurdities, of unconnected fables, senseless dogmas, puerile ceremonies, and notions borrowed from the Chaldeans, Egyptians, Phenicians, Grecians, and Romans. In one word, you confess that this religious system is

only the deformed offspring of almost all ancient superstitions, begotten by oriental fanaticism, and diversely modified by the circumstances and prejudices of those who have since pretended to be the inspired ambassadors of God, and the interpreters of his will.

You tremble at the horrors which the intolerant spirit of Christians has caused them to commit, whenever they had power to do it ; you feel that a religion founded on a sanguinary deity must be a religion of blood. You lament that phrenzy, which in infancy takes possession of princes and people, and renders them equally the slaves of superstition and her priests ; which prevents their acquaintance with their true interests, renders them deaf to reason, and turns them aside from the great objects by which they ought to be occupied. You confess that a religion founded upon enthusiasm or imposture can have no sure principles ; that it must prove an eternal source of disputes, and always end in causing troubles, persecutions, and ravages ; especially when political power conceives itself indispensibly obliged to enter into its quarrels. In fine, you go so far as to agree that a good Christian who follows literally the conduct prescribed to him as the most perfect by the gospel, knows not in this world any thing of those duties on which true morality is founded ; and that if he wants energy he must prove an useless misanthrope, or if his temper be warm a turbulent fanatic.

After acknowledging all this, how could it happen that you should pronounce my work a dangerous one ! You tell me that a wise man ought to think only for himself ; that to the populace a religion is necessary, be it good or bad ; that it is a restraint necessary to gross and ignorant minds, which, without it, would have no longer any motive for abstaining from vice. You look upon a reform of religious prejudices as impossible, because it is the interest of many of those persons who alone can effect it, to continue mankind in that ignorance of which themselves reap the advan-

tage. These, if I mistake not, are the weightiest of your objections. I will endeavour to remove them.

Books are generally written for that part of a nation whose circumstances, education, and sentiments, place them above the commission of crimes. This enlightened portion of society, which governs the other, reads and judges of writings; if they contain maxims false or injurious, they are soon either condemned to oblivion, or held up to public execration; if they contain only truth, they are not in danger. Fanatics and ignorant people are the disturbers of society. Sensible, enlightened, and disinterested persons are ever the friends of peace.

You are not, Sir, of the number of pusillanimous thinkers, who believe that truth is capable of doing harm. It does harm to those only who deceive mankind, and to the rest of the human species it will always be useful. You ought long to have been convinced that the evils with which mankind are afflicted; arise only from our errors, our prejudices, our interests misunderstood, and the false ideas we attach to objects.

In fine, it is easy to see that the policy and morality of man have been particularly corrupted by their religious prejudices. Was it not religious and supernatural ideas which caused sovereigns to be looked upon as gods? It is then religion which raised up tyrants and despots; tyrants and despots made wicked laws; their example corrupted the great, the great corrupted the lower classes of mankind; these vitiated beings became unhappy slaves, employed either in injuring themselves, flattering the great, or struggling to get clear of their misery. Kings were styled images of God: they were absolute like him; they created justice and injustice; their wills often sanctified oppression, violence, and rapine. The means of obtaining their favours were vice and meanness. Thus nations became filled with perverted citizens, who, under leaders corrupted by religious notions, made continually

a war, either open or clandestine, and were left destitute of any motive for practising virtue.

Has this religion influenced the manners of sovereigns, who derive their divine power from it? Do we not behold princes, overflowing with faith, continually undertaking the most unjust wars; wasting the blood and treasure of their subjects; wrenching the bread from the hands of the poor; permitting and even commanding every species of injustice? Does this religion, considered by so many sovereigns as the support of their thrones, render them more humane, temperate, chaste, or faithful to their oaths? Alas! when we consult history, we there find sovereigns who were orthodox, zealous, and religious to a scruple, and at the same time guilty of perjury, usurpation, adultery, robbery, and murder; men who, in fine, behaved as if they feared not the God whom they honoured with their mouths. Among the courtiers who surrounded them, we see a continual alliance of Christianity and vice, devotion and iniquity, religion and treason. Among the priests of a poor and crucified God, who found their existence upon religion, and pretend that without it there could be no morality, do we not see reigning amongst them, pride, avarice, wantonness, and revenge?

Amongst us, education is very little attended to by the government, which shews the most profound indifference concerning an object the most essential to the happiness of states. With most modern nations public education is confined to teaching of languages, useless to most who learn them. Christians, instead of morality, inculcate the marvellous fables and incomprehensible dogmas of a religion extremely repugnant to right reason. At the first step a young man makes in his studies, he is taught that he ought to renounce the testimony of his senses, to reject his reason as an unfaithful guide, and blindly conform himself to the dictates of his masters? But who are these masters? Priests, whose interest it is to continue mankind in

errors, of which they alone reap the advantage. Can the abject and isolated mind of these mercenary pedagogues be capable of instructing their pupils in that of which themselves are ignorant? Will they teach them to love the public good, to serve their country, to know the duties of the man and citizen? Certainly not; we can expect nothing from the hands of such teachers but ignorant and superstitious pupils, who, if they have profited of the lessons they have received, are unacquainted with every thing necessary in society, of which they must consequently become useless members.

On whatever side we cast our eyes, we see the study of the objects most important to man totally neglected. Morality, in which I also comprehend policy, is considered of very little importance in European education. The only morality taught by Christians is, the enthusiastic, impracticable, contradictory, and uncertain morality contained in the gospel. This is calculated only to degrade the mind, to render virtue odious, to form abject slaves, and break the spring of the soul; or, if it is sown in warm and active minds, to produce turbulent fanatics, capable of shaking the foundations of society.

Notwithstanding the inutility and perversity of the morality which Christianity teaches mankind, its partisans presume to tell us, that without this religion we cannot have morals. But what is it to have morals, in the language of Christians? It is to pray without ceasing, to frequent churches, to do penance, and to abstain from pleasure; it is to live in selfishness and solitude. What good results to society from these practices, all of which may be observed by a man who has not the shadow of virtue? If such morals lead to heaven, they are very useless on earth. But certain it is, that a man may be a faithful observer of all that Christianity enjoins, without possessing any of the virtues which reason shews to be necessary to the support of political society.

It is necessary, then, to carefully distinguish Christian morality from political morality ; the former makes saints, the latter citizens : one makes men useless, or even hurtful to the world ; the other has for its object the formation of members useful to society ; men active and vigorous, who are capable of serving it, who fulfil the duties of husbands, fathers, friends, and companions, whatever may be their metaphysical opinions, which, let theologists say what they will, are much less sure than the invariable rules of good sense.

In fact, it is certain, that man is a social being, who in all things seeks his own happiness ; that he does good when he finds it his interest ; that he is not commonly bad, because that would be contrary to his welfare. This being premised, let education teach men to know the relations which exist among themselves, and the duties arising from those relations ; let governments, calling to their aid laws, rewards, and punishments, confirm the lessons given by education ; let happiness accompany useful and virtuous actions, let shame, contempt, and chastisement be the rewards of vice. Then would mankind have a true morality, founded in their own nature upon their mutual wants, and the interest of nations at large. This morality, independent of the sublime notions of Theology, might perhaps have very little in common with Christian morality ; but society has nothing to lose from this circumstance, as has already been proved.

When the people receive a proper education, which, by inspiring them early in life with virtuous principles, will habituate them to do homage to virtue, detest crimes, condemn vice, and shrink from infamy ; such an education cannot be vain, when continual example shall prove to the citizens that talents and virtue are the only means of arriving at honour, fortune, distinction, consideration, and favour ; and that vice conducts only to contempt and ignominy.

If the clergy have usurped from the sovereign power the right of instructing the people, let the latter re-assume

its rights, or at least not suffer the former to enjoy the exclusive liberty of governing the manners of mankind, and dictating their morality. Let them teach, if they please, that their God transforms himself into bread, but let them never teach that we ought to hate or destroy those who refuse to believe this ineffable mystery. Let no individual in society have the power of exciting citizens to rebellion, of sowing discord, breaking the bands which unite the people amongst one another, and disturbing the public tranquillity for the sake of opinions. If it be said that all governments think it their interest to support religious prejudices, and manage the clergy through policy, although they themselves are undeceived; I answer, that it is easy to convince enlightened government, that it is their true interest to govern a happy people; that upon the happiness it procures the nation, depends the stability and safety of the government; in one word, that a nation composed of wise and virtuous citizens, are much more powerful than a troop of ignorant and corrupted slaves, whom the government is forced to deceive in order to satisfy, and to deluge with impositions that it may succeed in any enterprise.

Thus let us not despair, that truth will one day force its way even to thrones. If the light of reason and science reaches princes with so much difficulty, it is because interested priests and starveling courtiers endeavour to keep them in a perpetual infancy, point out to them chimerical prospects of power and grandeur, and thus turn away their attention from objects necessary to their true happiness.

Every government must feel that their power will always be tottering and precarious, so long as it depends for support on the phantoms of religion, the errors of the people, and the caprices of the priesthood. It must feel the inconveniencies resulting from fanatic administrations, which have hitherto produced nothing but ignorance and presumption, nothing but obstinate, weak citizens, incapable of doing service to the state,

and ready to receive the false impressions of guides who would lead them astray. It must perceive what immense resources might be derived from the wealth which has been accumulated by a body of useless men, who, under pretensions of teaching the nation, cheat and devour it.¹ Upon this foundation (which to the shame of mankind be it said, has hitherto served only to support sacerdotal pride) a wise government might raise establishments which would become useful to the state in forming the youth, cherishing talents, rewarding virtuous services, and comforting the people.

I flatter myself, Sir, that these reflections will exculpate me in your eyes. I do not hope for the suffrages of those who feel themselves interested in the continuance of the evils suffered by their fellow-citizens; it is not such whom I aim to convince; nothing can be made to appear evident to vicious and unreasonable men. But I presume to hope, that you will cease to look upon my book as dangerous, and my expectations as altogether chimerical. Many immoral men have attacked the Christian religion, because it opposed their propensities; many wise men have despised it, because to them it appeared ridiculous; many persons have looked upon it with indifference, because they did not feel its real inconveniencies. I attack it as a citizen, because it appears to me to be injurious to the welfare of the state, an enemy to the progress of the human mind, and opposed to the principles of true morality, from which political interests can never be separated. It remains only for me to say, with a poet, who was, like myself, an enemy to superstition:

..... Si tibi vera videtur
Dede manus, et si falsa est, accingere contra.

I am, &c.

¹ Some have thought that the clergy might one day serve as a barrier against despotism, but experience sufficiently proves that this body always stipulates for itself alone.

Christianity Unveiled,

&c.

CHAP. I.

INTRODUCTION.

OF THE NECESSITY OF AN INQUIRY RESPECTING RELIGION,
AND THE OBSTACLES WHICH ARE MET IN
PURSUING THIS INQUIRY.

A REASONABLE being ought in all his actions to aim at his own happiness and that of his fellow-creatures. Religion, which is held up as an object most important to our temporal and eternal felicity, can be advantageous to us only so far as it renders our existence happy in this world, or as we are assured that it will fulfil the flattering promises which it makes us respecting another. Our duty towards God, whom we look upon as the ruler of our destinies, can be founded, it is said, only on the evils which we fear on his part. It is then necessary that man should examine the grounds of his fears. He ought, for this purpose, to consult experience and reason, which are the only guides to truth. By the benefits which he derives from religion in the visible world which he inhabits, he may judge of the reality of those blessings for which it leads him to hope in that invisible world, to which it commands him to turn his views.

Mankind, for the most part, hold to their religion through habit. They have never seriously examined the reasons why they are attached to it, the motives of their conduct, or the foundations of their opinions. Thus, what has ever been considered as most important to all, has been of all things least subjected to

scrutiny. Men blindly follow on in the paths which their fathers trod ; they believe, because in infancy they were told they must believe ; they hope, because their progenitors hoped ; and they tremble, because they trembled. Scarcely ever have they deigned to render an account of the motives of their belief. Very few men have leisure to examine, or fortitude to analyse, the objects of their habitual veneration, their blind attachment, or their traditional fears. Nations are carried away in the torrent of habit, example, and prejudice. Education habituates the mind to opinions the most monstrous, as it accustoms the body to attitudes the most uneasy. All that has long existed appears sacred to the eyes of man ; they think it sacrilege to examine things stamped with the seal of antiquity. Prepossessed in favour of the wisdom of their fathers, they have not the presumption to investigate what has received their sanction. They see not that man has ever been the dupe of his prejudices, his hopes, and his fears ; and that the same reasons have almost always rendered this enquiry equally impracticable.

The vulgar, busied in the labours necessary to their subsistence, place a blind confidence in those who pretend to guide them, give up to them the right of thinking, and submit without murmuring to all they prescribe. They believe they shall offend God, if they doubt, for a moment, the veracity of those who speak to them in his name. The great, the rich, the men of the world, even when they are more enlightened than the vulgar, have found it their interest to conform to received prejudices, and even to maintain them ; or, swallowed up in dissipation, pleasure, and effeminacy, they have no time to bestow on a religion, which they easily accommodate to their passions, propensities, and fondness for amusement. In childhood, we receive all the impressions others wish to make upon us ; we have neither the capacity, experience, or courage, necessary to examine what is taught us by those, on

whom our weakness renders us dependent. In youth, the ardour of our passions, and the continual ebriety of our senses, prevent our thinking seriously of a religion, too austere and gloomy to please ; if by chance a young man examines it, he does it with partiality, or without perseverance ; he is often disgusted with a single glance of the eye on an object so disgusting. In riper age, new passions and cares, ideas of ambition, greatness, power, the desire of riches, and the hurry of business, absorb the whole attention of man, or leave him but few moments to think of religion, which he never has the leisure to scrutinize. In old age, the faculties are blunted, habits become incorporated with the machine, and the senses are debilitated by time and infirmity ; and we are no longer able to penetrate back to the source of our opinions ; besides, the fear of death then renders an examination, over which terror commonly presides, very liable to suspicion.

Thus, religious opinions, once received, maintain their ground, through a long succession of ages ; thus nations transmit from generation to generation ideas which they have never examined : they imagine their welfare to be attached to institutions in which, were the truth known, they would behold the source of the greater part of their misfortunes. Civil authority also flies to the support of the prejudices of mankind, compels them to ignorance by forbidding inquiry, and holds itself in continual readiness to punish all who attempt to undeceive themselves.

Let us not be surprised, then, if we see error almost inextricably interwoven with human nature. All things seem to concur to perpetuate our blindness, and hide the truth from us. Tyrants detest and oppress truth, because it dares to dispute their unjust and chimerical titles ; it is opposed by the priesthood because it annihilates their superstitions. Ignorance, indolence, and passion render the great part of mankind accomplices of those who strive to deceive them,

in order to keep their necks beneath the yoke, and profit by their miseries. Hence nations groan under hereditary evils, thoughtless of a remedy ; being either ignorant of the cause, or so long accustomed to disease, that they have lost even the desire of health.

If religion be the object most important to mankind, if it extends its influences not only over our conduct in this life, but also over our eternal happiness, nothing can demand from us a more serious examination. Yet it is of all things, that, respecting which, mankind exercise the most implicit credulity. The same man, who examines with scrupulous nicety things of little moment to his welfare, wholly neglects inquiry concerning the motives which determine him to believe and perform things, on which, according to his own confession, depend both his temporal and eternal felicity. He blindly abandons himself to those whom chance has given him for guides ; he confides to them the care of thinking for him, and even makes a merit of his own indolence and credulity. In matters of religion, infancy and barbarity seem to be the boast of the greater part of the human race.

Nevertheless, men have in all ages appeared, who, shaking off the prejudices of their fellows, have dared to lift before their eyes the light of truth. But what could their feeble voice effect against errors imbibed at the breast, confirmed by habit, authorised by example, and fortified by a policy, which often became the accomplice of its own ruin ? The stentorian clamours of imposture soon overwhelm the calm exhortations of the advocates of reason. In vain shall the philosopher endeavour to inspire mankind with courage, so long as they tremble beneath the rod of priests and kings.

The surest means of deceiving mankind, and perpetuating their errors, is to deceive them in infancy. Amongst many nations at the present day, education seems designed only to form fanatics, devotees, and monks ; that is to say, men either useless or injurious

to society. Few are the places in which it is calculated to form good citizens. Princes, to whom a great part of the earth is at present unhappily subjected, are commonly the victims of a superstitious education, and remain all their lives in the profoundest ignorance of their own duties, and the truest interests of the states which they govern. Religion seems to have been invented only to render both kings and people equally the slaves of the priesthood. The latter is continually busied in raising obstacles to the felicity of nations. Wherever this reigns, other governments have but a precarious power; and citizens become indolent, ignorant, destitute of greatness of soul, and, in short, of every quality necessary to the happiness of society.

If, in a state where the Christian religion is professed, we find some activity, some science, and an approach to social manners; it is, because nature, whenever it is in her power, restores mankind to reason, and obliges them to labour for their own felicity. Were all Christian nations exactly conformed to their principles, they must be plunged into the most profound inactivity. Our countries would be inhabited by a small number of pious savages, who would meet only to destroy each other. For why should a man mingle with the affairs of a world, which his religion informs him is only a place of passage? What can be the industry of that people, who believe themselves commanded by their God to live in continual fear, to pray, to groan, and afflict themselves incessantly? How can a society exist which is composed of men who are convinced that, in their zeal for religion, they ought to hate and destroy all whose opinions differ from their own? How can we expect to find humanity, justice, or any virtue, amongst a horde of fanatics, who copy in their conduct a cruel, dissembling, and dishonest God? A God who delights in the tears of his unhappy creatures, who sets for them the ambush, and then punishes them for having fallen into it? A

God who himself ordains robbery, persecution, and carnage?

Such, however, are the traits with which the Christian religion represents the God which it has inherited from the Jews. This God was a sultan, a despot, a tyrant, to whom all things were lawful. Yet he is held up to us as a model of perfection. Crimes, at which human nature revolts, have been committed in his name; and the greatest villainies have been justified by the pretence of their being committed, either by his command, or to merit his favour. Thus the Christian religion, which boasts of being the only true support of morality, and of furnishing mankind with the strongest motives for the practice of virtue, has proved to them a source of divisions, oppressions, and the blackest crimes. Under the pretext of bringing peace on earth, it has overwhelmed it with hate, discord, and war. It furnishes the human race with a thousand ingenious means of tormenting themselves, and scatters amongst them scourges unknown before. The Christian, possessed of common sense, must bitterly regret the tranquil ignorance of his idolatrous ancestors.

If the manners of nations have gained nothing by the Christian religion, governments, of which it has pretended to be the support, have drawn from it advantages equally small. It establishes to itself in every state a separate power, and becomes the tyrant or the enemy of every other power. Kings were always the slaves of priests; or if they refused to bow the knee, they were proscribed, stripped of their privileges, and exterminated either by subjects whom religion had excited to revolt, or assassins whose hands she had armed with her sacred poignard. Before the introduction of the Christian religion, those who governed the state, commonly governed the priesthood; since that period, sovereigns have dwindled into the first slaves of the priesthood, the mere executors of its vengeance and its decrees.

Let us then conclude, that the Christian religion

has no right to boast of procuring advantages either by policy or morality. Let us tear aside the veil with which it envelopes itself. Let us penetrate back to its source. Let us pursue it in its course; we shall find that, founded on imposture, ignorance, and credulity, it can never be useful but to men who wish to deceive their fellow-creatures. We shall find, that it will never cease to generate the greatest evils among mankind, and that instead of producing the felicity it promises, it is formed to cover the earth with outrages, and deluge it in blood; that it will plunge the human race in delirium and vice, and blind their eyes to their truest interests and their plainest duties.

CHAP. II.

SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS.

In a small country, almost unknown to others, lived a nation, the founders of which having too long been slaves among the Egyptians, were delivered from their servitude by a priest of Heliopolis, who, by means of his superior genius and knowledge, gained the ascendancy over them.¹ This man, known by the name of

¹ Maneton and Cheremon, Egyptian historians, respecting whom testimonies have been transmitted to us by Joseph the Jew, inform us that a multitude of lepers were drawn out of Egypt by king Amenophis; and that these exiles elected for their leader a priest of Heliopolis whose name was Moses, and who formed for them a religion and a code of laws. Joseph contre Appon. liv. i. chap. ix. 11, 12.

Diodorus Siculus also relates the history of Moses.—Vide translation of Abbe Terrasson.

Be this as it may, Moses, by the confession of the Bible itself, began his career by assassinating an Egyptian, who was quarrelling with an Hebrew; after which he fled into Arabia, and married the daughter of an idolatrous priest, by whom he was often reproached for his cruelty. Thence he returned into Egypt, and placed himself at the head of his nation, which was dissatisfied with king

Moses, being educated in the mysteries of a religion, which was fertile in prodigies, and the mother of superstitions, placed himself at the head of a band of fugitives, whom he persuaded that he was an interpreter of the will of their God, whose immediate commands he pretended to receive. He proved his mission, it is said, by works which appeared supernatural to men ignorant of the operations of nature, and the resources of art. The first command that he gave them on the part of his God was to rob their masters, whom they were about to desert. When he had thus enriched them with the spoils of Egypt, being sure of their confidence, he conducted them into a desert, where, during forty years, he accustomed them to the blindest obedience. He taught them the will of heaven, the marvellous fables of their forefathers, and the ridiculous ceremonies to which he pretended the Most High attached his favours. He was particularly careful to inspire them with the most envenomed hatred against the gods of other nations, and the most refined cruelty to those who adored them. By means of carnage and severity, he rendered them a nation of slaves, obsequious to his will, ready to second his passions, and sacrifice themselves to gratify his ambitious views. In one word, he made the Hebrews monsters of phrenzy and ferocity. After having thus animated them with the spirit of destruction, he shewed them the lands and possessions of their neighbours, as an inheritance assigned them by God himself.

Proud of the protection of Jehovah, the Hebrews marched forth to victory. Heaven authorised in them knavery and cruelty. Religion, united to avidity, rendered them deaf to the cries of nature; and, under the conduct of inhuman chiefs, they destroyed the

Pharaoh. Moses reigned very tyrannically; the examples of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, prove to what kind of people he had an aversion. He at last disappeared like Romulus, no one being able to find his body, or the place of his sepulture.

Canaanitish nations with a barbarity, at which every man must revolt, whose reason is not wholly annihilated by superstition. Their fury destroyed every thing, even infants at the breast, in those cities whither these monsters carried their victorious arms. By the commands of their God, or his prophets, good faith was violated, justice outraged, and cruelty exercised.

This nation of robbers, usurpers, and murderers, at length established themselves in a country, not indeed very fertile, but which they found delicious in comparison with the desert in which they had so long wandered. Here, under the authority of the visible priests of their hidden God, they founded a state, detestable to its neighbours, and at all times the object of their contempt or their hatred. The priesthood, under the title of a theocracy, for a long time governed this blind and ferocious people. They were persuaded that in obeying their priests they obeyed God himself.

Notwithstanding their superstition, the Hebrews at length, forced by circumstances, or perhaps weary of the yoke of priesthood, determined to have a king, according to the example of other nations. But in the choice of the monarch they thought themselves obliged to have recourse to a prophet. Thus began the monarchy of the Hebrews. Their princes, however, were always crossed in their enterprises by inspired priests and ambitious prophets, who continually laid obstacles in the way of every sovereign whom they did not find sufficiently submissive to their own wills. The history of the Jews at all times shews us nothing but kings blindly obedient to the priesthood, or at war with it, and perishing under its blows.

The ferocious and ridiculous superstitions of the Jews rendered them at once the natural enemies of mankind, and the object of their contempt. They were always treated with great severity by those who made inroads upon their territory. Successively enslaved by the Egyptians, the Babylonians, and the

Grecians, they experienced from their masters the bitterest treatment, which was indeed but too well deserved. Often disobedient to their God, whose own cruelty, as well as the tyranny of his priests frequently disgusted them, they were never faithful to their princes. In vain were they crushed beneath sceptres of iron; it was impossible to render them loyal subjects. The Jews were always the dupes of their prophets, and in their greatest distresses their obstinate fanaticism, ridiculous hopes, and indefatigable credulity, supported them against the blows of fortune. At last, conquered with the rest of the earth, Judah submitted to the Roman yoke.

Despised by their new masters, the Jews were treated hardly, and with great haughtiness; for their laws, as well as their conduct, had inspired the hearts of their conquerors with the liveliest detestation. Soured by misfortune, they became more blind, fanatic, and seditious. Exalted by the pretended promises of their God; full of confidence in oracles, which have always announced to them a felicity which they have never tasted; encouraged by enthusiasts, or by impostors, who successively profit by their credulity; the Jews have, to this day, expected the coming of a Messiah, a monarch, a deliverer, who shall free them from the yokes beneath which they groan, and cause their nation to reign over all other nations in the universe.

CHAP. III.

SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

IN the midst of this nation, thus disposed to feed on hope and chimera, a new prophet arose, whose sectaries in process of time have changed the face of the earth. A poor Jew, who pretended to be descended

from the royal house of David,¹ after being long unknown in his own country, emerges from obscurity, and goes forth to make proselytes. He succeeded amongst some of the most ignorant part of the populace. To them he preached his doctrines, and taught them that he was the Son of God, the deliverer of his oppressed nation, and the Messiah announced by the prophets. His disciples, being either impostors, or themselves deceived, rendered a clamorous testimony of his power, and declared that his mission had been proved by miracles without number. The only prodigy which he was incapable of effecting, was that of convincing the Jews, who, far from being touched with his beneficent and marvellous works, caused him to suffer an ignominious death. Thus the Son of God died in the sight of all Jerusalem; but his followers declare that he was secretly resuscitated three days after his death. Visible to them alone, and invisible to the nation which he came to enlighten and convert to his doctrine, Jesus, after his resurrection, say they, conversed some time with his disciples, and then ascended into heaven, where, having again become equal to God the father, he shares with him the adorations and homages of the sectaries of his law. These sectaries, by accumulating superstitions, inventing impostures, and fabricating dogmas and mysteries, have, by little and little, heaped up a distorted and unconnected system of religion which is called Christianity, after the name of Christ its founder.

The different nations, to which the Jews were suc-

¹ The Jews say that Jesus was the son of one Pandira, or Panther, who had seduced his mother Mary, a milliner, the wife of Jochanan. According to others, Pandira, by some artifice, enjoyed her several times, while she thought him her husband; after which, she becoming pregnant, her husband, suspicious of her fidelity, retired into Babylon. Some say that Jesus was taught magic in Egypt, from whence he went and exercised his art in Galilee, where he was put to death.—Vide Peiffer, Theol. Jud. and Mahom. &c. Principia. Lipsiae, 1687.

cessively subjected, had infected them with a multitude of Pagan dogmas. Thus the Jewish religion, Egyptian in its origin, adopted many of the rites and opinions of the people, with whom the Jews conversed. We need not then be surprised, if we see the Jews, and the Christians their successors, filled with notions borrowed of the Phenicians, the Magi or Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. The errors of mankind respecting religion have a general resemblance; they appear to differ only by their combinations. The commerce of the Jews and Christians with the Grecians made them acquainted with the philosophy of Plato, so analogous to the romantic spirit of the orientals, and so conformable to the genius of a religion which boasts in being inaccessible to reason.¹ Paul, the most ambitious and enthusiastic of the apostles, carried his doctrines, seasoned with the sublime and marvellous, among the people of Greece and Asia, and even the inhabitants of Rome. He gained proselytes, as every man who addresses himself to the imagination of ignorant people may do; and he may be justly styled the principal founder of a religion, which, without him, could never have spread far; for the rest of its followers were ignorant men, from whom he soon separated himself to become the leader of his own sect.²

The conquests of the Christian religion were, in its infancy, generally limited to the vulgar and ignorant. It was embraced only by the most abject amongst the

¹ Origen says, that Celsus reproached Christ with having borrowed many of his maxims from Plato. See Origen contra Cel. chap. i. 6. Augustin confesses, that he found the beginning of the Gospel of John, in Plato. See S. Aug. Conf. l. vii. ch. 9, 10, 11. The notion of the word is evidently taken from Plato; the church has since found means of transplanting a great part of Plato, as we shall hereafter prove.

² The Ebionites, or first Christians, looked upon St. Paul as an apostate and an heretic, because he wholly rejected the law of Moses, which the other apostles wished only to reform.

Jews and Pagans. It is over men of this description that the marvellous has the greatest influence.¹ An unfortunate God, the innocent victim of wickedness and cruelty, and an enemy to riches and the great, must have been an object of consolation to the wretched. The austerity, contempt of riches, and apparently disinterested cares of the first preachers of the gospel, whose ambition was limited to the government of souls; the equality of rank and property enjoined by their religion, and the mutual succours interchanged by its followers; these were objects well calculated to excite the desires of the poor, and multiply Christians. The union, concord, and reciprocal affection, recommended to the first Christians, must have been seductive to ingenious minds: their submissive temper, their patience in indigence, obscurity, and distress, caused their infant sect to be looked upon as little dangerous in a government accustomed to tolerate all sects. Thus, the founders of Christianity had many adherents among the people,² and their opposers and enemies consisted chiefly of some idolatrous priests and Jews, whose interest it was to support the religion previously established. By little and little, this new system, covered with the clouds of mystery, took deep root, and became too strong and extensive to be suppressed. The Roman government saw too late the progress of an association it had despised. The Christians now become numerous, dared to brave the Pagan gods, even in their temples. The emperors and magistrates, disquieted at such proceedings, endeavoured to extin-

¹ The first Christians were, by way of contempt, called Ebionites, which signifies beggars or mendicants. See Origen contra Celsum, lib. ii. et Euseb. Hist. Eccles. lib. iii. c. 37. Ebion, in Hebrew, signifies poor. The word Ebion has since been personified into the meaning of an heretic, or the leader of a sect, who were excluded from sacred things, and scarcely considered as men. It promised them that they should one day have their turn, and that, in the other life, they should be happier than their masters.

² Le peuple.

guish the sect which gave them umbrage. They persecuted such as they could not reclaim by milder means, and whom their fanaticism had rendered obstinate. The feelings of mankind are ever interested in favour of distress; and this persecution only served to increase the number of the friends of the Christians. The fortitude and constancy with which they suffered torment, appeared supernatural and divine in the eyes of those who were witnesses to it; their enthusiasm communicated itself, and produced new advocates for the sect, whose destruction was attempted.

After this explanation, let Christians no longer boast the marvellous progress of their religion. It was the religion of poverty; it announced a God who was poor. It was preached by the poor, to the poor and ignorant. It gave them consolation in their misery. Even its gloomy ideas were analogous to the disposition of indigent and unhappy men. The union and concord so much admired in the earlier Christians, is by no means surprising. An infant and oppressed sect naturally remain united, and dread a separation of interests. It is astonishing that, in those early days, men who were themselves persecuted and treated as malcontents, should presume to preach intolerance and persecution. The tyranny exercised against them wrought no change in their sentiments. Tyranny only irritates the human mind, which is always invincible, when those opinions are attacked to which it has attached its welfare. Such is the inevitable effect of persecution. Yet Christians, who ought to be undeceived by the example of their own sect, have to this day been incapable of divesting themselves of the fury of persecution.

The Roman emperors, having themselves become Christians, that is to say, carried away by a general torrent, which obliged them to avail themselves of the support of a powerful sect, seated religion on the throne. They protected the church and its ministers, and endeavoured to inspire their courtiers with their own ideas. They beheld with a jealous eye those who

retained their attachment to the ancient religion. They, at length, interdicted the exercise of it, and finished by forbidding it under the pain of death. They persecuted without measure those who held to the worship of their ancestors. The Christians now repaid the Pagans, with interest, - the evils which they had before suffered from them. The Roman empire was shaken with convulsions, caused by the unbridled zeal of sovereigns and those pacific priests, who had just before preached nothing but mildness and toleration. The emperors, either from policy or superstition, loaded the priesthood with gifts and benefactions, which indeed were seldom repaid with gratitude. They established the authority of the latter; and at length respected as divine what they had themselves created. Priests were relieved from all civil functions, that nothing might divert their minds from their sacred ministry.¹ Thus the leaders of a once insignificant and oppressed sect became independent. Being at last more powerful than kings, they soon arrogated to themselves the right of commanding them. These priests of a God of peace, almost continually at variance with each other, communicated the fury of their passions to their followers; and mankind were astonished to behold quarrels and miseries engendered, under the law of grace, which they had never experienced under the peaceful reign of the Divinities, who had formerly shared without dispute the adoration of mortals.

Such was the progress of a superstition, innocent in its origin, but which, in its course, far from producing happiness among mankind, became a bone of contention, and a fruitful source of calamities.

Peace upon earth, and good will towards men.

Thus is the gospel announced, which has cost the human race more blood than all other religions of the earth taken collectively.

¹ See Tillemont's Life of Constantine. Vol. IV. Art. 32.

Love the Lord thy God with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself.

This, according to the God and Legislator of the Christians, is the sum of their duties. Yet we see it is impossible for Christians to love that severe and capricious God whom they worship. On the other hand, we see them eternally busied in tormenting, persecuting, and destroying their neighbours and brethren.

To find an explanation of these contradictions, it is sufficient to cast our eyes upon the God which the Christians inherited from the Jews. Not contented with the shocking colours in which he was painted, the Christians have still more disfigured his portrait. The Legislator of the Hebrews speaks only of the transient punishments of this life; the Christian represents his God as pouring out unbounded vengeance to all eternity. In one word, Christian fanaticism feeds itself with the idea of an hell, where its God, transformed into a ferocious executioner, as unjust as implacable, shall bathe himself in the tears of his wretched creatures, and perpetuate their existence, to render them eternally miserable. There, clothed in vengeance, he shall mock at the torments of sinners, and listen with rapture to the groans with which they shall make the brazen roofs of their prisons resound; not the smallest hope of some distant termination of their pains shall give them an interval of imaginary relief.

The Christians in adopting the terrible God of the Jews, have sublimed his cruelty. They represent him as the most capricious, wicked, and cruel tyrant which the human mind can conceive, and suppose him to treat his subjects with a barbarity and injustice truly worthy of a demon. In order to be convinced of this truth, let us contemplate, for a moment, a picture of the Jewish mythology, adopted and rendered still more extravagant by the Christians.

CHAP. IV.

OF THE CHRISTIAN MYTHOLOGY, OR THE IDEAS OF GOD, AND HIS CONDUCT, GIVEN US BY THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

GOD, by an inconceivable act of his omnipotence, created the universe out of nothing.¹ He made the earth for the residence of man, whom he created in his own image. Scarcely had this man, the prime object of the labours of his God, seen the light, when his Creator set a snare for him, into which he undoubtedly knew that he must fall. A serpent, who speaks, seduces a woman, who is not at all surprised at the phenomenon. She, being persuaded by the serpent, solicits her husband to eat of a fruit forbidden by God himself. Adam, the father of the human race, by this light fault, draws upon himself and his innocent posterity innumerable evils, which are followed, but not terminated by death. By the offence of only one man, the whole human race incurs the wrath of God, and they are at length punished for involuntary faults with an universal deluge. God repents having peopled the earth, and he finds it easier to drown and destroy the human race, than to change their hearts.

A small number of the just, however, escaped this destructive flood; but the deluged earth, and the destruction of mankind, did not satiate the implacable vengeance of their Creator. A new generation appeared. These, although descended from the friends of God, whom he had preserved in the general ship-

¹ *Ex nihilo nihil fit*, was considered as an axiom by ancient philosophers. The creation, as admitted by the Christians of the present day, that is to say, the eduction of all things from nothing, is a theological invention, not, indeed, of very remote date. The word Barah, which is used in Genesis, signifies to compose, arrange, to dispose matter already existing.

wreck of the world, incense him by new crimes. The almighty is represented as having been incapable of rendering his creature such as he desired him. A new torrent of corruption carries away mankind; and wrath is again excited in the bosom of Jehovah.

Partial in his affections and his preferences, he, at length, casts his eyes on an idolatrous Assyrian. He enters into an alliance with this man, and covenants that his posterity shall be multiplied to the number of the stars of heaven, or the sands of the sea, and that they shall for ever enjoy the favour of God. To this chosen race he reveals his will; for them, unmindful of his justice, he destroys whole nations. Nevertheless, this favoured race is not the more happy or the more attached to their God. They fly to strange gods, from whom they seek succours, which are refused to them by their own. They frequently insult the God who is able to exterminate them. Sometimes he punishes, sometimes consoles them; one while he hates them without cause, and another caresses them with as little reason. At last, finding it impossible to reclaim this perverse people, for whom he continues to feel the warmest tenderness, he sends amongst them his own son. To this son they will not listen. What do I say? This beloved son, equal to God his father, is put to an ignominious death by his favourite nation. His father, at the same time, finds it impossible to save the human race, without the sacrifice of his own son. Thus an innocent God becomes the victim of a just God, by whom he is beloved. Both consent to this strange sacrifice, judged necessary by a God, who knows that it will be useless to an hardened nation, which nothing can reclaim. We should expect that the death of this God, being useless to Israel, must serve, at least, to expiate the sins of the rest of the human race. Notwithstanding the eternal alliance with the Hebrews, solemnly sworn to by the Most High, and so many times renewed, that favourite nation find themselves at last deserted by their God, who

could not reduce them to obedience. The merits of the sufferings and death of his Son, are applied to the nations before excluded from his bounty. These are reconciled to heaven, now become more just in regard to them, and return to grace. Yet, in spite of all the efforts of God, his favours are lavished in vain. Mankind continue to sin, enkindle the divine wrath, and render themselves worthy of the eternal punishments, previously prepared and destined for the greater part of the human race.

Such is the faithful history of the God, on whom the foundation of the Christian religion is laid. His conduct being so strange, cruel, and opposite to all reason, is it surprising to see the worshippers of this God ignorant of their duties, destitute of humanity and justice, and striving to assimilate themselves to the model of that barbarous divinity which they adore? What indulgence have mankind a right to expect from a God, who spared not even his own son? What indulgence can the Christian, who believes this fable, shew to his fellow-creature? Ought he not to imagine that the surest means of pleasing his God, is to imitate his ferocity and cruelty?¹

It is at least evident, that the sectaries of such a God must have a precarious morality, founded on principles destitute of all firmness. This God, in fact, is not always unjust and cruel; his conduct varies. Sometimes he appears to have created all nature for man alone; at others, he seems to have created man only as an object, whereon to exercise his arbitrary rage. Sometimes they are cherished by him, notwithstanding all their faults; at others, the whole species is condemned to eternal misery for an apple. This unchangeable God is alternately agitated by anger

¹ The sacrifice of the Son of God is mentioned as a proof of his benevolence. Is it not rather a proof of his ferocity, cruelty, and implacable vengeance? A good Christian, on his death-bed said, "he had never been able to conceive how a good God could put an innocent God to death, to appease a just God."

and love, revenge and pity, benevolence and fury. His conduct is continually destitute of that uniformity which characterises wisdom. Partial in his affections, he makes it the duty of his favourite people to commit deliberately the most atrocious crimes. He commands them to violate good faith, and condemn the rights of nations. He enjoins upon them the commission of robbery and murder. On other occasions, we see him forbidding the same crimes, ordaining justice, and prescribing to mankind abstinence from whatever disturbs the good order of society. This God, who is in turn styled the God of Vengeance, the God of Mercies, the God of Arms, and the God of Peace, is ever at variance with himself. His subjects are consequently each one at liberty to copy that part of his conduct which he finds most congenial to his humour. Hence their morality becomes arbitrary. It is surprising, that Christians have never yet been able to agree amongst themselves, whether it would be most pleasing to their God to tolerate the various opinions of mankind, or to exterminate all who differ from themselves. It is, in fact, a problem with them, whether it be most expedient to persecute and assassinate those who think not as they do, or to treat them with humanity, and suffer them to live in peace.

Christians, however, do not fail to justify the strange and often iniquitous conduct attributed to their God in the Scriptures. This God, say they, being of right the absolute master of his creatures, can dispose of them at his pleasure, and for this no one can accuse him of injustice, or demand an account of his conduct. His justice is not the justice of mankind, and they have no right to censure any of his actions. It is easy to perceive the insufficiency of this answer. Mankind in making justice an attribute of their God, can have no idea of this virtue, but by supposing that it resembles the justice of their fellow-creatures. If God have a justice, which in its essence differs from that of man, we know not what it is, and we attribute to him

a quality of which we have no idea. If it be said, that God owes nothing to his creatures, he is supposed to be a tyrant, whose conduct has no rule but his own caprice, and who cannot continue to be a model for us, having no longer any relation with us, seeing all relations must be reciprocal. If nothing be due from God to his creatures, how can any thing be due from them to him? If, as we are continually told, men are to God, as the clay in the hands of the potter, no moral relation can exist between them. It is, nevertheless, upon those relations that all religion is founded. Therefore, to say that God has no duty towards his creatures, and that his justice is different from that of mankind, is to sap the foundations of all religion and justice, which necessarily suppose that God ought to reward mankind for doing good, and punish them for doing evil.

In fine, how can the followers of the Christian system reconcile that barbarous conduct, and those sanguinary commands, attributed to him in the Scriptures, with his goodness or his wisdom? And how can goodness be an attribute of a God, who has created most of the human race only to damn them eternally?

Here we shall be told that the conduct of God is, to us, an impenetrable mystery, that we have no right to scrutinize it, and that our feeble reason must be lost whenever it attempts to sound the depth of divine wisdom. We are informed that we must adore in silence, and tremblingly submit to the oracles of a God, who has himself sufficiently made known his will in his holy Scriptures. This is what they call revelation, to which we proceed in the next chapter.

CHAP. V.

OF REVELATION.

How can we know, without the aid of reason, that God hath spoken? But, on the other side, is not reason proscribed by the Christian religion? Is not the use of reason forbidden, in the examination of the marvellous dogmas with which we are presented by this religion? Does it not continually exclaim against a profane reason, which it accuses of insufficiency, and often regards as rebellious to heaven? In order to be capable of judging of divine revelation, we must have a just idea of the Divinity. But seeing human reason is too weak and grovelling to exalt itself to an acquaintance with the Supreme Being, from what source shall we derive that idea, beside revelation itself? Thus revelation itself is to become the proof of the authority of revelation.

Let us pass on from this conjuror's circle, and open the sacred books, destined to enlighten mankind, and before which reason must fall prostrate. Do they exhibit any precise ideas of the God, whose oracles they announce? Can we draw from them any just conceptions of its attributes? Is not this God represented as a mass of extraordinary qualities, which form an inexplicable enigma? If this revelation be, as is supposed, an emanation from God himself, who can confide in him? Does he not paint himself as false, unjust, deceitful, and cruel; as setting snares for mankind; seducing, hardening, and leading them astray?

¹ By the Scriptures and the Fathers of the Church, God is always represented as a seducer. He permits Eve to be seduced by a serpent. He hardens the heart of Pharaoh. Christ himself is a stone of stumbling. Such are the points of view under which the Divinity is exhibited to us.

Thus the man, desirous of being assured of the truth of Christian revelation, finds himself, at the first step of enquiry, plunged into distrust and perplexity, which is increased by the indeterminable disputes of his sacred guides, who have never been able to agree upon the manner of understanding the oracles of a Divinity which they say has revealed itself.

The hesitation and fear of the man who honestly examines the revelation adopted by Christians, must redouble, when he sees their God represented as revealing himself only to a few favourites of the human race, while he carefully conceals himself from the remainder, to whom, notwithstanding this, revelation is equally necessary. He must be uncertain whether or not he is of the number, to whom this partial God deigns to make himself known.

Must not his heart be troubled at the sight of a God, who vouchsafes to discover himself, and announce his decrees, only to a number of men, inconsiderable in comparison with the whole human race? Is he not tempted to accuse this God of a malevolence too dark, when he finds that for want of revealing himself to so many millions of mankind, he has caused their inevitable misery through an endless succession of ages? What ideas must he form to himself of a God who inflicts this punishment upon them for their ignorance of secret laws, which he has published by stealth in an obscure and unknown corner of Asia?

Thus Christians, even when they consult the Scriptures, find all things conspiring to put them on their guard against the God exhibited therein. Every thing inspires distrust of his moral character. All things float in an uncertainty. This God, in concert with the pretended interpreters of his will, seems to have formed the design of redoubling the darkness of his ignorance. He is, however, told, in order to appease his doubts, that the revealed will of God consists of mysteries; that is to say, things inaccessible to human understanding. In this case what need was there of

having spoken? Ought a God to reveal himself to mankind for the sole purpose of not being comprehended? Is not such conduct as ridiculous as it is unreasonable? To say that God has revealed himself only to announce mysteries, is to say that he has revealed himself in order to remain unknown, to conceal from us his views, embarrass our understandings, and augment our ignorance and uncertainty.

A true revelation, proceeding from a just and good God, and necessary to all mankind, ought to be clear enough to be understood by all the human race. But will the revelation, upon which Judaism and Christianity are founded, bear the test of this criterion? The Elements of Euclid are intelligible to all who endeavour to understand them. This work excites no dispute among geometers. Is it so with the Bible? and do its revealed truths occasion no disputes among divines? By what fatality have writings revealed by God himself still need of commentaries? and why do they demand additional lights from on high, before they can be believed or understood? Is it not astonishing, that what was intended as a guide for mankind, should be wholly above their comprehending? Is it not cruel, that what is of most importance to them should be least known? All is mystery, darkness, uncertainty, and matter of dispute, in a religion intended by the Most High to enlighten the human race.

Far from contenting themselves with the pretended mysteries contained in the Scriptures, the priests of the Christian religion have, from age to age, invented new ones, which, though never mentioned by their God, their disciples are forced to believe. No Christian can entertain a doubt concerning the mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the efficacy of sacraments; and yet Christ never explained these subjects. Among Christians every thing seems to be abandoned to the imagination, caprice, and arbitrary decision of priests, who arrogate to themselves the right of fabricating mysteries and articles of faith, as their interests

occasionally require. Thus, this revelation perpetuates itself by means of the church, which pretends to be inspired by God, and which, far from enlightening the minds of her children, delights to confound, and plunges them in a sea of uncertainty.

Such are the effects of this revelation, which forms the basis of the Christian religion, and of the reality of which we are not permitted to doubt. God, it is said, has spoken to mankind. But when has he spoken? Thousands of years ago, by prophets and inspired men, whom he has chosen as organs of communication with mankind. But how can it be proved to have been God himself who spoke, except by having recourse to the testimony of the very persons who pretend to have received his commands? These interpreters of the divine will were then men; and are not men liable to be deceived themselves, and prone to deceive others? How then can we discover what confidence is due to the testimony which these organs of heaven give in favour of their own mission? How shall we be made sure that they have not been the dupes of some illusion, or an overheated imagination?

At this remote period, how can we be certain that Moses conversed with God, and received from him the law which he communicated to the Hebrews? What was the temperament of this Moses? Was he phlegmatic or enthusiastic, honest or knavish, ambitious or disinterested, a practiser of truths or of falsehood? What confidence can be placed in the testimony of a man, who, after pretending to have performed so many miracles, could not convert his people from idolatry; and who, after having caused forty-seven thousand Israelites to perish by the sword, has the effrontery to assume the title of the meekest of mankind? Is it certain that the books which are attributed to Moses, and report so many miraculous circumstances, are perfectly authentic? In fine, what proof have we of his mission, except the testimony of a number of super-

stitious, ignorant, and credulous Israelites, who were probably the dupes of a ferocious legislator?

What proofs does the Christian religion give us of the mission of Jesus Christ? Are we acquainted with his character and temperament? What degree of confidence can we place in the testimony of his disciples, who, by their own confession, were ignorant and unlearned men, and, consequently, liable to be imposed upon by the artifices of a dexterous impostor? Ought not the testimony of the most learned in Jerusalem to have greater weight with us, than that of the lowest vulgar, whose ignorance always renders them the dupes of those who endeavour to deceive them? These enquiries bring us to an examination of the proofs which are adduced in support of the Christian religion.

CHAP. VI.

OF THE PROOFS OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION, MIRACLES, PROPHECIES, AND MARTYRS.

WE have seen, in the preceding chapters, what just reasons there are to doubt the authenticity of the revelation of the Jews and Christians.

And further, relative to this article, Christianity has no advantage over any other religion.

All the religions on earth, notwithstanding their discordance, declare that they have emanated from God, and pretend to possess an exclusive right to his favours.

The Indian asserts, that the Brama himself is the author of his worship. The Scandinavian derives his from the awful Odin. If the Jew and the Christian have received theirs from Jehovah by the ministry of Moses and Jesus, the Mahometan affirms, that he has received his from his prophet, inspired by the same God. Thus all religions pretend to a divine origin; and they all interdict the use of reason in the examina-

tion of their sacred titles. Each pretends to be the only true one, to the exclusion of all others. All menace with the wrath of heaven those who refuse to submit to their authority, and all acquire the character of falsehood by the palpable contradictions with which they are filled ; by the mis-shapen, obscure, and often odious ideas which they give of the Godhead ; by the whimsical laws which they attribute to him, and by the disputes which they generate among their sectaries. In *fine*, they all appear to be a mass of impostures and reveries, equally disgusting to reason. Thus, on the score of pretensions, the Christian religion has no advantage over the other superstitions with which the world is infected ; and its divine origin is contested by all others with as much propriety as theirs is denied by it.

How then shall we decide in its favour ? How prove the validity of its pretensions ? Has it any superior qualities, by which it merits the preference ? And if so, what are they ? Does it, better than any other, make us acquainted with the nature and essence of God ? Alas ! it only renders them more incomprehensible. It represents him as a capricious tyrant, whose whimsies are sometimes favourable, but more commonly injurious to mankind. Does it render mankind better ? Alas ! it arms them against each other, renders them intolerant, and forces them to butcher their brethren. Does it render empires flourishing and powerful ? Wherever it reigns, do we not see the people debased, destitute of energy, and ignorant of true morality ? What then are the proofs which are to establish the superiority of the Christian religion over all others ? We are answered, “ miracles, prophecies, and martyrs.” But these are to be found in all religions of the earth. There are in all nations men, who, being superior to the vulgar in science and cunning, deceive them with imposture, and dazzle them with performances which are judged to be supernatural, by men ignorant of the secrets of nature and the resources of art.

If the Jew cite the miracles of Moses, I see them performed before a people most ignorant, abject, and credulous, whose testimony has no weight with me. I may, also, suspect that these pretended miracles have been inserted in the sacred books of the Hebrews long after the death of those who might have testified the truth concerning them. If the Christians cite Jerusalem, and the testimony of Gallilee, to prove the miracles of Christ, I see them attested only by an ignorant populace; or I demand how it could be possible that an entire people, who had been witnesses to the miracles of Christ, should consent to his death, and even earnestly demand it? Would the people of London, or Paris, suffer a man who had raised the dead, restored the blind to sight, and healed the lame and paralytic, to be put to death before their eyes? If the Jews demanded the death of Jesus, all his miracles are at once annihilated in the mind of every unprejudiced person.

May not we, also, oppose to the miracles of Moses, and Christ, those performed by Mahomet in presence of all Mecca and Arabia assembled? The effect of his miracles was, at least, to convince the Arabians that he was a divine person. The miracles of Jesus convinced nobody of his mission. Saint Paul himself, who afterwards became the most ardent of his disciples, was not convinced by the miracles, of which, in his time, there existed so many witnesses. A new one was necessary for his conviction. And by what right do they at this day demand belief of miracles, which could not convince even in the time of the Apostles; that is to say, a short time after they were wrought?

Let it not be said that the miracles of Christ are as well attested as any fact in profane history, and that to doubt them is as ridiculous as to doubt the existence of Scipio or Cæsar, which we believe only on the report of the historians by whom they are mentioned. The existence of a man, of the general of an army, or

an hero, is not improbable; neither is it a miracle.¹ We believe the probable facts, whilst we reject, with contempt, the miracles recounted by Titus Livius. The most stupid credulity is often joined to the most distinguished talents. Of this, the Christian religion furnishes us with innumerable examples. In matters of religion, all testimony is liable to suspicion. The most enlightened men see but ill, when they are intoxicated with enthusiasm, and dazzled by the chimeras of a wild imagination. A miracle is a thing impossible in the order of nature. If this be changed by God, he is not immutable.

It will probably be said, that, without changing the order of things, God and his favourites could not find resources in nature unknown to mankind in general. But then their works would no longer be supernatural, and would have nothing of the marvellous. A miracle is an effect contrary to the established laws of nature. God himself, therefore, cannot perform miracles without counteracting the institutions of his own wisdom. A wise man, having seen a miracle, might with propriety doubt the evidence of his own senses. He ought carefully to examine, whether the extraordinary effect, which he does not comprehend, proceeds not from some natural cause, whose manner of acting he does not understand.

But let us suppose, for a moment, that miracles may exist, and that those of Christ were real, or, at least, that they were inserted in the Gospels by persons who imagined they had seen them. Are the witnesses who transmitted, or the Apostles who saw them, extremely deserving of credit? And have we not a right to re-

¹ A supernatural event requires, in order to be believed, much stronger proofs than a fact in no-wise contradictory to probability. It is easy to believe, upon the testimony of Philostrates, that Appollonius existed, because his existence has nothing in it that shocks reason; but I will not believe Philostrates, when he tells me, that Appollonius performed miracles. I believe that Jesus Christ died; but I do not believe that he arose from the dead.

fuse their testimonies? Were those witnesses very deserving men? By the confession of the Christians themselves they were ignorant men, taken from the dregs of the people, and consequently credulous and incapable of investigation. Were those witnesses disinterested? No; it was, undoubtedly, their chief interest to support those miracles, upon which were suspended the divinity of their master, and the truth of the religion they were endeavouring to establish. Are those miracles confirmed by the testimony of cotemporary historians? Not one of them has mentioned those extraordinary facts. We find not a single Jew or Pagan in the superstitious city of Jerusalem who heard even a word of the most marvellous facts that ever were recorded, and facts which happened in the midst of them. The miracles of Christ were ever attested by Christians only. We are requested to believe that, at the death of the Son of God, the earth quaked, the sun was darkened, and the dead arose. How does it happen that such extraordinary events have been noticed only by a handful of Christians? Were they the only persons who perceived them? We are told, also, that Christ arose from the dead; to prove which, they appeal to the testimony of his Apostles and followers. Would not one solemn apparition, in some public place, have been more decisive than all those clandestine ones, made to persons interested in the formation of a new sect? The Christian faith, according to St. Paul, is founded on the resurrection of Christ. This, then, ought to have been demonstrated to mankind, in the clearest and most indisputable manner.¹

¹ The Barilidians and Corinthians, heretics who lived in the infancy of Christianity, maintained that Jesus was not dead, and that Simon the Cyrenian was crucified in his place. See Epiph. Hær. c. 28. Thus, there were men, from the birth of the church, who doubted the crucifixion, and, consequently, the resurrection of Christ; and yet we are exhorted to believe them at the present day.

Have we not room to accuse the Saviour of the world with want of benevolence, in shewing himself only to his disciples and favourites ? It seems that he did not desire that all the world should believe in him. The Jews, it is said, deserve to be blinded for putting Christ to death. But, if this be the case, why did the apostles preach to them the gospel ? Could it be expected that the Jews would believe the report of the apostles, rather than their own eyes ?

Miracles appear to have been invented to supply the want of good reasons. Truth and evidence have no need of miracles to ensure their reception. Is it not very astonishing that God Almighty should find it easier to derange the order of nature, than to convince mankind of truths the most evident, and calculated to force their assent ? Miracles were made to prove things which it is impossible to believe. There is no need of miracles when we talk of reason. Things incredible are here adduced in proof of incredible things. Almost all impostors who have fabricated religions, have announced incredibilities to mankind. They have afterwards fabricated miracles in proof of those incredibilities. " You cannot comprehend," said they, " what I tell you ; but I will clearly prove to you that I tell the truth, by doing things that you cannot comprehend." People have in all ages been overcome by this brilliant reasoning. A passion for the marvellous has prevented enquiry. Mankind have not perceived that miracles could neither prove impossibilities, nor change the essence of truth. Whatever wonders a man, or, if you please, a God may perform, they can never prove that two and two are not four, or that three are no more than one. They cannot prove that an immaterial being, destitute of organs, has spoken to man ; or that a good, wise, and just Being has commanded the execution of injustice, folly, and cruelty. It appears, therefore, that miracles prove nothing, unless it be the address and impostures of those who are desirous of profiting by the stupid credulity of mankind,

and endeavour to seduce them into a belief of the most extravagant falsehoods. Such men have always began by falsely pretending to have an intimate commerce with God, in order to prove which, they have performed wonders that they attribute to the Being by whom they say they were commissioned. Every man, who performs miracles, endeavours to establish, not truth, but falsehood. Truth is simple and evident ; the marvellous is ever to be suspected. Nature is always true to herself ; she acts by unvarying laws. To say that God performs miracles, is to say that he contradicts himself, and violates the laws which he has prescribed to nature. It is to say, that he renders useless human reason, of which he is the author. Impostors alone can pronounce it necessary to discredit experience and reject reason.

Thus, the pretended miracles of the Christian, as well as all other religions, have no foundation, but the ignorance, credulity, and enthusiasm of mankind, and the cunning of impostors. The same may be said of prophecies. Mankind are ever anxious to pry into futurity ; and there are always some kind individuals disposed to aid them in the gratification of this desire. There have been enchanter, diviners, and prophets, in all the nations of the earth. The Jews have not been happier, in this respect, than others. Tartars, Negroes, and Indians have their share of impostors. All societies will find deceivers enough, so long as they are willing to pay for deception.

These inspired men have not been ignorant, that their prophecies ought to be extremely vague and ambiguous, in order that they might not, in process of time, appear to have been falsehoods.. We need not, therefore, be surprised, that the Jewish prophecies are very dark, and of such a nature, that any thing may be found in them which interpreters think proper to seek. Those which are attributed to Christ, by his followers, are not considered in the same light by the Jews, who still expect the Messiah, whom the

former believe to have been on earth eighteen centuries ago. The Jewish prophecies uniformly announce the deliverer of a discontented and oppressed nation. Such a one was also expected by the Romans, and almost all the nations of the earth. All mankind have a natural propensity to hope for a termination of the evils they suffer, and believe that Providence cannot, in justice, fail to render them, one day, happy. The Jews, the most superstitious nation on earth, building upon the supposed promise of their God, have always expected the coming of a monarch or conqueror, who is to elevate them from disgrace, and crown them with triumph. It was impossible for them to see this deliverer in the person of Jesus, who, instead of being the restorer of the Hebrew nation, was its destroyer; and since whose coming, they seem to have lost all favour with God.

It is asserted, that the destruction of the Jewish nation, and the dispersion of the Jews, were themselves foretold, and that they furnish a convincing proof of the truth of Christian prophecy. To this I answer, it was easy to foretel the dispersion and destruction of a restless, turbulent, and rebellious people, continually torn and convulsed by intestine divisions. Besides, this people was often conquered and dispersed. The temple destroyed by Titus, had previously suffered the same fate from Nebuchadnezzar, who carried the captive tribes into Assyria, and spread them through his territories. The dispersion of the Jews is more perceptible than that of other conquered nations, because they have generally, after a certain time, become confounded with their conquerors; whereas the Jews refuse to intermingle, by domestic connections, with the nations where they reside, and have religiously maintained this distinction. It is not the same with the Cuebres or Parsis, of Persia and Indostan, as well as the Armenians, who dwell in Mahometan countries. The Jews remain dispersed,

because they are unsocial, intolerant, and blindly attached to their superstitions.¹

Thus Christians have no reason to boast of the prophecies contained in the books of the Jews, nor to make invidious applications of them to that nation, because they detest its religion.

Judea was always subjected to priests, who had great influence over affairs of state. They were always meddling with politics, and undertook to foretel the events, fortunate or unfortunate, which were to befall the nation. No country was ever more fertile in prophets. This description of men instituted schools, where they initiated into the mysteries of their art those who proved themselves worthy of that honour, by discovering a wish to deceive a credulous people, and by such honest means acquire riches and respect.²

The art of prophesying was then an actual profession, or an useful and profitable branch of commerce in that miserable nation, which believed God to be incessantly busied in their affairs. The great gains resulting from this traffic of imposture must have caused divisions among the Jewish prophets. Accordingly, we find them crying down each other. Each one treated his rivals as false prophets, inspired by evil spirits. There have always been quarrels among impostors, to decide who should have the exclusive right of deceiving mankind.

¹ The Acts of the Apostles evidently prove, that, even before the time of Jesus, the Jews began to be dispersed. Jews came from Greece, Persia, Arabia, &c. to the feast of Pentecost. Acts, c. ii. 8. So that, after Jesus, the inhabitants of Judea only were dispersed by the Romans.

² Saint Jerome says, that the Sadducees did not adopt the prophets, but contented themselves with believing the five books of Moses. Dodwell, *De Jure Laicorum*, asserts, that the prophets prepared themselves to prephesy by drinking wine. See page 259. It seems they were jugglers, poets, and musicians, who had made themselves masters of their trades, and knew how to exercise them profitably.

If we examine the conduct of the boasted prophets of the Old Testament, we shall find them far from being virtuous persons. We see arrogant priests continually meddling with affairs of state, and interweaving them with religion. We see in them seditious subjects, incessantly caballing against all sovereigns, who were not sufficiently submissive to them. They cross their projects, excite their subjects to rebellion, effect their destruction, and thus accomplish the fatal predictions, which they had before made against them.¹ Such is the character of most of the prophets, who have played a part in the history of the Jews.

The studied obscurity of the prophecies is such, that those which are commonly applied to the Messiah, or the deliverer of Israel, are equally applicable to every enthusiast or prophet that appeared in Jerusalem or Judea. Christians, heated with the idea of Christ, think they meet him in all places, and pretend to see him in the darkest passages of the Old Testament. Deluding themselves by force of allegories, subtilties, commentaries, and forced interpretations, they have discovered the most formal predictions in all the vague oracles and nonsensical trash of the prophets.²

¹ The prophet Samuel, displeased with Saul, who refused to second his cruelty, declared that he had forfeited the crown, and raised up a rival to him in the person of David. Elias appears to have been a seditious subject, who, finding himself unable to succeed in his rebellious designs, thought proper to escape due punishment by flight. Jeremiah himself gives us to understand that he conspired with the Assyrians against his besieged country. He seems to have employed himself in depriving his fellow-citizens of both the will and the courage to defend themselves. He purchased a field of his relations, at the very time when he informed his countrymen that they were about to be dispersed, and led away in captivity. The king of Assyria recommends this prophet to his general, Nebuzaradan, whom he commands to take great care of him.—See Jeremiah.

² Any thing may be found in the Bible, if it be read with the imagination of Saint Augustine, who pretended to see all the New

Men are not scrupulous respecting things which accord with their desires. When we examine, without prejudice, the prophecies of the Hebrews, we find them to be a mis-shapen mass of rhapsodies, the offspring of fanaticism and delirium. We find them obscure and enigmatical, like the oracles of the Pagans. In fine, it is evident that these pretended divine oracles are the vagaries and impostures of men, who imposed on the credulity of a superstitious nation which believes in dreams, visions, apparitions, and sorceries, and received with avidity any deception, provided it were sufficiently decorated with the marvellous. Wherever mankind are ignorant, there will be found prophets and workers of miracles, and these two branches of commerce will always decay in the same proportion as mankind become enlightened.

Among the proofs of the authenticity of their religion, Christians enumerate a multitude of martyrs, who have sealed with their blood their belief of the

Testament in the Old. According to him, the death of Abel is a type of that of Christ; the two wives of Abraham are the synagogue and the church; a piece of red cloth held up by an harlot, who betrayed Jericho, signifies the blood of Christ; the lamb, goat, and lion, are figures of Jesus Christ; the brazen serpent represents the sacrifice on the cross. Even the mysteries of the Christian religion are announced in the Old Testament. Manna represents the Eucharist, &c. See S. Aug. Sermon 78. and Ep. 156. How can a man, in his senses, see, in the Immanuel announced by Isaiah, the Messiah, whose name is Jesus? Isaiah c. vii. v. 14. How discover, in an obscure and crucified Jew, a leader who shall govern Israel? How see a royal deliverer and restorer of the Jews, in one, who, far from delivering his nation, came only to destroy their laws; and after whose coming their land was desolated by the Romans? A man must be sharp-sighted indeed to find the Messiah in their predictions. Jesus himself does not seem to have been more clear, or happy, in his prophecies. In the Gospel of Luke, chap. xxi. he speaks of the last judgment: he mentions angels, who, at the sound of the trumpet, assemble mankind together before him. He adds, "Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away, until these things are accomplished." The world, however, still stands, and Christians have been expecting the last judgment for eighteen hundred years.

opinions they had embraced. There is no religion destitute of ardent defenders, who would sacrifice their lives for the opinions to which they believe their eternal happiness attached. Superstitious and ignorant men are obstinate in their prejudices. Their credulity prevents them from suspecting any deception in their spiritual guides. Their vanity persuades them that they are incapable of wavering; and if, in fine, their imaginations be strong enough to see the heavens open, and a recompense prepared therein for their courage, there is no torment they will not brave and endure. In their intoxication they will despise all torments of short duration; they will smile upon their executioners; and their souls, alienated from earthly things, will become insensible to pain. In such scenes, the hearts of spectators are softened; they admire the astonishing firmness of the martyr; they catch his enthusiasm, and believe his cause just. His courage appearing to them supernatural and divine, becomes an indubitable proof of the truth of his opinions. Thus, by a sort of contagion, enthusiasm communicates itself. **Men are always** interested in the fate of those who shew the greatest firmness; and tyranny always multiplies the friends of those whom it persecutes. The constancy of the first Christians must, therefore, have produced proselytes, by a natural effect of their conduct. Martyrs prove nothing, unless it be the strength of the enthusiasm, error, and obstinacy produced by superstition, and the barbarous folly of those who persecute their fellow-creatures for religious opinions.

Every violent passion has its martyrs. Pride, vanity, prejudice, love, patriotism, and even vice itself, produces martyrs; or, at least, a contempt of every kind of danger. Is it, then, surprising, that enthusiasm and fanaticism, the strongest passions of mankind, have so often enabled men, inspired with the hopes they give, to face and despise death? Besides, if Christians can boast a catalogue of martyrs, Jews

can do the same. The unfortunate Jews, condemned to the flames by the Inquisition, were martyrs to their religion; and their fortitude proves as much in its favour, as that of the Christians can do in favour of Christianity. If martyrs demonstrate the truth of a religion, there is no religion or sect which may not be looked upon as true.

In fine, among the perhaps exaggerated number of martyrs, boasted by Christians, many were rather the victims of an inconsiderate zeal, a turbulent and seditious spirit, than a real love of religion. The church itself does not presume to justify some, who, transported by a volcanic zeal, have troubled the peace of the earth, and poured out flaming destruction on all who differed in opinion from themselves; until mankind, consulting their own tranquillity and safety, have destroyed them. If men of this description were to be considered as martyrs, every disturber of society, when punished, would acquire a right to this title.

CHAP. VII.

OF THE MYSTERIES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

To reveal any thing to a man, is to discover to him secrets of which he was before ignorant. If we ask Christians what the secrets were, the importance of which rendered it necessary that they should be revealed by God himself, we shall be told that the greatest of those secrets, and the one most necessary to mankind, is the Unity of the Godhead; a secret which, say they, human wisdom could never have discovered of itself. But are we not at liberty to doubt the truth of this assertion? Moses, undoubtedly, declared an only God to the Hebrews, and did all in his power to ren-

der them enemies to the idolatry and polytheism of other surrounding nations, whose belief and whose modes of worship he represented as abominable in the eyes of the celestial Monarch, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. But have not many wise men among the heathens discovered, without the assistance of the Jewish revelation, one supreme God, superior to all others? Moreover, was not Fate, to which all the other gods of the heathens were subordinate, an only God, to whose sovereign law all nature was subject? As to the colours in which Moses paints his Godhead, neither Jews nor Christians have a right to pride themselves therein. He is represented as a capricious and irascible despot, full of cruelty, injustice, partiality, and malignity. What kind of being shall we contemplate, when we add to this the ineffable attributes ascribed to him in the Christian theology? Is the Godhead described when it is said that it is a spirit, an immaterial being, which resembles nothing presented to us by our senses? Is not human understanding confounded with the negative attributes of infinity, immensity, eternity, omnipotence, and omniscience, with which he has been decorated, only to render him still more incomprehensible? How can the wisdom, the goodness, justice, and other moral qualities of this God, be reconciled with that strange and often atrocious conduct, which are attributed to him in almost every page of the Old and New Testament? Would it not have been better to have left mankind in entire ignorance of the Godhead, than to reveal to him a God made up of contradictions, which lead to eternal dispute, and serve only to trouble his repose? To reveal such a God to mankind, is only to discover to them the means to embarrass and render themselves wretched, and quarrel with and injure one another.

But, be this as it may, is it true that Christianity admits but one God, the same which was revealed by Moses? Do we not see Christians adore a threefold

divinity, under the name of the Trinity? The supreme God begat from all eternity a son equal to himself; from these two proceeds a third equal to the two first; these three Gods, equal in perfection, divinity, and power, form, nevertheless, only one God. To overturn this system, it seems sufficient only to shew its absurdity. Is it but to reveal such mysteries as these that the Godhead has taken pains to instruct mankind? Have opinions more absurd and contrary to reason ever existed among the most ignorant and savage nations?¹ In the mean time, however, the writings of Moses contain nothing that could authorise the construction of a system so wild. It is only by having recourse to the most forced explanations, that the doctrine of the Trinity is pretended to be found in the Bible. As to the Jews, contented with the only God which their legislator has declared to them, they have never attempted to create a three-fold one.

The second of these Gods, or, according to the Christians, the second person of the Trinity, having clad himself with human nature, and become incarnate

¹ The dogma of the Trinity is evidently borrowed from the reveries of Plato, or from the allegories under which that romantic philosopher chose to conceal his doctrine. It appears that to him the Christian religion is indebted for the greater part of its dogmas. Plato admitted three Hypostases, or modes of being in the Divinity. The first constituted the supreme God; the second the Logos, Word, or divine intelligence proceeding from the first; the third is the Spirit, or Soul of the World. The early teachers of the Christian religion appear to have been Platonics; their enthusiasm probably found in Plato a doctrine analogous to their feelings; had they been grateful, they would have recorded him as a prophet, or, at least, as one of the fathers of the church. The Jesuitical missionaries found a Divinity, nearly similar to that of the Christians, at Thibet. Among the Tartars, God is called Kon-cio-cik, the only God, and Kon-cio-sum, the threefold God. They also give him the titles Om, Ha, Hum, intelligence, might, power or words, heart, love. The number three was always revered among the ancients; because Salom, which in the Oriental languages signifies three, signifies also health, safety, salvation.

in the womb of a virgin, he submitted himself to the infirmities of our species, and even suffered an ignominious death to expiate the sins of the earth. This is what Christians call the mystery of Incarnation. He must be indeed blind, who cannot see these absurd notions are borrowed from the Egyptians, Indians, and Grecians, whose ridiculous mythologies describe gods as possessing human forms, and subject to infirmities, like mankind.¹

Thus, we are commanded by Christianity to believe that a God having become man without doing injury to his divine nature, has suffered, died, and offered himself a sacrifice to himself; and all this was absolutely and indispensibly necessary to appease his own wrath. This is what Christians denominate the mystery of the redemption of the human race.

This dead God, however, was resuscitated. Thus the Adonis of the Phenicians, the Osiris of the Egyptians, and the Atys of the Phrygians, are represented as periodically resigning and re-assuming life. The God of the Christians rises again, re-animated, and bursts the tomb, triumphant.

Such are the wondrous secrets, or sublime mysteries, that the Christian religion unfolds to its disciples. So great, so abject, and so ever incomprehensible are the ideas it gives us of the divine Being. Such is the illumination our minds receive from revelation! A revelation which only serves to render still more impenetrable the clouds which veil the divine essence from human eyes. God, we are told, is willing to render himself inconsistent and ridiculous, to confound the curiosity of those whom, we are at the same

¹ The Egyptians appear to have been the first who pretended that their gods had assumed material bodies. Foe, the God of the Chinese, was born of a virgin, who was fecundated by a ray of the sun. In Indostan nobody doubts the incarnations of Vistnou. It seems that theologists of all nations, despairing to exalt themselves to a level with God, have endeavoured to debase him to a level with themselves.

time informed, he desires to enlighten by his special grace. What must we think of a revelation which, far from teaching us any thing, is calculated to darken and puzzle the clearest ideas?

Thus, notwithstanding the boasted revelation of the Christians, they know nothing of that Being whom they make the basis of their religion. On the contrary, it only serves to obscure all the notions which might otherwise be formed of him. In Holy Writ he is called an hidden God. David tells us, that he places his dwelling in darkness, that clouds and troubled waters form the pavilion with which he is covered. In fine, Christians, although enlightened, as they say, by God himself, have only ridiculous and inconsistent ideas of him, which render his existence doubtful, or even impossible, in the eyes of every man who consults his reason.

What notions, indeed, can we form of a God, who, after having created the world solely for the happiness of mankind, nevertheless suffers the greater part of the human race to be miserable both in this world and that which is to come? How can a God, who enjoys a supreme felicity, be offended with the actions of his creatures? This God is then susceptible of grief; his happiness can be disturbed; he is then dependent on man, who can, at pleasure, delight or afflict him! How can a benevolent God bestow on his creatures a fatal liberty by the abuse of which they may incur his anger, and their own destruction? How can that Being, who is himself the author of life and nature, suffer death? How can an only God become triple without injuring his unity? We shall be answered, that all these matters are mysteries; but such mysteries destroy even the existence of God. It would be more reasonable to admit, with Zoroaster, or Manes, two principles or opposite powers in nature, than to believe, with Christians, that there is an omnipotent God, who cannot prevent the existence of evil; a God who is just, and yet partial; a God all-merciful, and yet so

implacable, that he will punish through an eternity the crimes of a moment ; an only God, who is threefold ; a God, the chief of beings, who consents to die, being unable to satisfy by any other means his divine justice. If, in the same subject, contraries cannot subsist at the same time, either the existence of the God of the Jews, or that of the Christians, must undoubtedly be impossible. Whence we are forced to conclude, that the teachers of Christianity, by means of the attributes with which they have decorated, or rather disfigured their Godhead, have, in fact, annihilated the God of the Jews, or, at least, so transformed him, that he is no longer the same. Thus, revelation, with all its fables and mysteries, has only embarrassed the reason of mankind, and rendered uncertain the simple notions which they might form to themselves of that necessary Being, who governs the universe with immutable laws. Though the existence of a God cannot be denied, it is yet certain that reason cannot admit the existence of the one which the Christians adore, and whose conduct, commands, and qualities, their religion pretends to reveal. If they are Atheists, who have no ideas of the Supreme Being, the Christian theology must be looked upon as a project invented to destroy his existence.¹

¹ Divines have always disagreed among themselves respecting the proofs of the existence of a God. They mutually style each other Atheists, because their demonstrations have never been the same. Few Christians have written on the existence of God, without drawing upon themselves an accusation of Atheism. Descartes, Clarke, Pascal, Arnauld, and Nicole, have been considered as Atheists. The reason is plain. It is impossible to prove the existence of a Being so inconsistent as the God of the Christians. We shall be told that men have no means for judging of the Divinity, and that our understandings are too narrow to form any idea of him. Why then do they dispute incessantly concerning him ? Why assign to him qualities which destroy each other ? Why recount fables concerning him ? Why quarrel and cut each others throats, because they are differently interpreted by different persons ?

CHAP. VIII.

MYSTERIES AND DOGMAS OF CHRISTIANITY.

NOT content with having enveloped their God in mysterious clouds and Judaic fables, the teachers of Christianity seem to be still busied in the multiplication of mysteries, and embarrassing more and more the reason of their disciples. Religion, designed to enlighten mankind, is only a tissue of enigmas ; a labyrinth which sound sense can never explore. That which ancient superstitions found most incomprehensible, seems not unaptly to be interwoven with a religious system, which imposes eternal silence on reason. The fatalism of the Grecians has been transformed, in the hands of Christian priests, into predestination. According to this tyrannic dogma, the God of mercies has destined the greatest part of mankind to eternal torments. He places them in this world that they, by the abuse of their faculties and liberty, may render themselves worthy of the implacable wrath of their Creator. A benevolent and prescient God gives to mankind a free will, of which he knows they will make so perverse an use, as to merit eternal damnation. Thus, instead of punishing them with the propensities necessary to their happiness, he permits them to act, only that he may have the pleasure of plunging them into hell. Nothing can be more horrid than the description given us by Christians of this place, destined to be the future residence of almost all mankind. There a merciful God will, throughout an eternity, bathe himself in the tears of wretches, whom he created for misery. Sinners, shut up in this awful dungeon, will be delivered up for ever to devouring flames. There shall be heard weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. The torments of this place shall, at the end of millions of years, have only begun.

The consoling hope of a distant mitigation of pain shall be unknown. In one word, God, by an act of his omnipotence, shall render man capable of miseries uninterrupted, and interminable. His justice will punish finite crimes, the effects of which are limited by time, by torments infinite in degree and duration. Such is the idea a Christian forms of the God that demands his love. This tyrant creates him only to render him miserable; he gives him reason to deceive him, and propensities to lead him astray. He gives him liberty, that he may incur eternal ruin. He gives him advantages above the beasts, that he may be subjected to torments, which beasts, like inanimate substances, are incapable of suffering. The dogma of predestination represents the lot of man as worse than that of brutes and stones.¹

It is true, the Christian religion promises a blissful residence to those whom God shall have chosen to be objects of his love. But this place is reserved only for a small number of elect, who, without any merit in themselves, shall, nevertheless, have unbounded claims upon the grace of God.

Thus, the Tartarus and Elysium of the heathen mythology, invented by impostors to awe and seduce mankind, have been transplanted into the system of the Christians, who have given them the new appellation of Heaven and Hell.

¹ The doctrine of predestination was also a tenet of the Jews. In the writings of Moses, a God is exhibited, who, in his decrees, is partially fond of a chosen people, and unjust to all others. The theology and history of the Greeks represent men as punished for necessary crimes, foretold by oracles. Of this Orestes, Oedipus, Ajax, &c. are examples. Mankind have always described God as the most unjust of all beings. According to the Jansenists, God bestows his grace on whom he pleases, without any regard to merit. This is much more conformable to the Christian, Pagan, and Jewish fatalism, than the doctrine of the Molinists, who say that God grants his grace to all who ask and deserve it. It is certain that Christians in general are true fatalists. They evade this accusation, by declaring that the designs of God are mysteries. If so, why do they eternally dispute about them?

The followers of the Christian religion believe in a race of invisible beings, different from man and subordinate to God, part of whom is employed in executing the wrath of God upon offenders ; and part in watching over his works, and particularly the preservation of man. The former, being malevolent spirits, are called devils, demons, &c. the latter, being benevolent spirits, are called angels. They are supposed to have the faculty of rendering themselves sensible, and taking the human form. Good angels are, in the imagination of Christians, what the Nymphs, Lares, and Penates, were imagined to be by the heathens, and what the Fairies were with writers of romances. The sacred books of the Jews and Christians are replete with these marvellous beings, whom God has sent to his favourites to be their guides, protectors, and tutelar deities.

Devils are considered as the enemies and seducers of the human race, and perpetually busied in drawing them into sin. A power is attributed to them of performing miracles, similar to those wrought by the Most High ; and, above, a power that counteracts his, and renders all his projects abortive. In fact, the Christian religion does not formally allow the same power to the devil as to God ; nevertheless, it supposes that malevolent being prevents mankind from entering into the enjoyment of the felicity destined them by the goodness of God, and leads most of them into eternal perdition. Christians, however, do virtually attribute to the devil an empire much more extensive than that of the Supreme Being. The latter, with difficulty, saves a few elect ; while the former carries off, in spite of him, the greater part of mankind, who listen to his destructive temptations, rather than the absolute commands of God. This Satan, the cause of so much terror to Christians, was evidently borrowed from the doctrine of two principles, formerly admitted in Egypt and all the East. The Osyris and Typhon of the Egyptians, the Orosmales and Ahari-

manes of the Persians and Chaldeans, have undoubtedly given birth to the continual war between the God of Christians and his formidable adversary. By this system mankind have endeavoured to account for all the good and evil with which life is chequered. An Almighty Devil serves to justify the Supreme Being with respect to all necessary and unremitted evils which afflict the human race.

Such are the dreadful and mysterious doctrines upon which Christians in general are agreed. There are many others which are peculiar to different sects. Thus, a numerous sect of Christians admit an intermediate state between heaven and hell, where souls, too sinful for the former and too innocent for the latter, are subjected for a time, in order to expiate by their sufferings the sin they commit in this life; after undergoing this punishment, they are received into the abodes of eternal felicity. This doctrine, which was evidently drawn from the reveries of Plato, has, in the hands of the Roman priests, been converted into an inexhaustible source of riches. They have arrogated to themselves the power of opening the gates of purgatory, and pretend that, by their prayers, they can mitigate the rigour of the divine decrees, and abridge the torments of the souls, condemned to this place by a just God.¹

¹ It is evident that the Roman Catholics are indebted to Plato for their purgatory. That great philosopher divided souls into three classes: the pure, the curable, and the incurable. The first returned, by refusion, to the universal soul of the world, or the divinity, from which they had emanated; the second went to hell, where they passed in review every year before the judges of that dark empire, who suffered them to return to light when they had sufficiently expiated their faults; the incurables remained in Tartarus, where they were to suffer eternal torment. Plato, as well as Christian casuists, described the crimes, faults, &c. which merit those different degrees of punishment.

Protestant divines, jealous probably of the riches of the Catholic clergy, have imprudently rejected the doctrine of a purgatory, whereby they have much diminished their own credit. It would,

The preceding remarks shew, that the Christian religion has been often inculcated and spread by dint of terror. By striking mankind with horror they render them submissive, and remove all his dependence on his reason.¹

CHAP. IX.

OF THE RITES AND MYSTERIOUS CEREMONIES OR THEURGY OF THE CHRISTIANS.

IF the doctrines of the Christian religion be mysteries inaccessible to reason ; if the God it announces be inconceivable, we ought not to be surprised at seeing the rites and ceremonies of this religion mysterious and unintelligible. Concerning a God, who hath revealed himself only to confound human reason, all things must necessarily be incomprehensible and unreasonable.

The most important ceremony of the Christian religion is called baptism. Without this, no man, it is held, can be saved. It consists in pouring water on the infant or adult, with an invocation on the name of the Trinity. By the mysterious virtue of this water, and the words by which it is accompanied, the

perhaps, have been wiser to have rejected the doctrine of an hell, whence souls can never be released, than that of purgatory, which is more reasonable, and from which the clergy can deliver souls by means of that all-powerful agent, money.

¹ Mahomet perceived, as well as Christian divines, the necessity of frightening mankind, in order to govern them. "Those," says the Koran, "who do not believe, shall be clothed in a garment of fire; boiling water shall be poured on their heads; their skins and their entrails shall be smitten with rods of iron. Whenever they shall strive to escape from hell, and avoid its torments, they shall be thrust again into it; and the devils say unto them, 'taste the pain of burning'." See Alcoran, ch. viii.

person is spiritually regenerated. He is cleansed from the stains, transmitted through successive generations, from the father of the human race. In a word, he becomes a child of God, and is prepared to enter into his glory at death. Now, it is said, that the death of man is the effect of the sin of Adam; and if, by baptism, sin be effaced, why is man still subject to death? But here we are told, it is from the spiritual, not bodily death, that Christ has delivered mankind. Yet this spiritual death is only the death of sinfulness. In this case, how does it happen that Christians continue to sin, as if they had never been redeemed and delivered from sin? Whence it results, that baptism is a mystery impenetrable to reason; and its efficacy is disproved by experience.¹

In some Christian sects, a bishop or pontiff, by pronouncing a few words, and applying a few drops of oil to the forehead, causes the spirit to descend upon whom he pleases. By this ceremony the Christian is confirmed in the faith, and receives invisibly a profusion of graces from the Most High. Those who wandering farthest from reason, have entered most deeply into the spirit of the Christian religion, not contented with the dark mysteries common to other sects, have invented one still darker and more astonishing, which they denominate transubstantiation. At the all-powerful command of a priest, the God of the Universe is forced to descend from the habitation of his glory, and transform himself into a piece of bread. This bread is afterwards worshipped by a people, who boast their detestation of idolatry.²

¹ The ceremony of baptism was practised in the mysteries of *Mythas*, and those initiated were thereby regenerated. This *Mythas* was also a mediator. Although Christian divines consider baptism necessary to salvation, we find Paul would not suffer the Corinthians to be baptised. We also learn that he circumcised *Timotheus*.

² The *Bramas* of *Indostan* distribute a kind of grain in their pagodas: this distribution is called *Prajadin*, or *Eucharist*. The

In the puerile ceremonies, so highly valued by Christians, we cannot avoid seeing the plainest traces of the Theurgy practised among the Orientals, where the Divine Being, compelled by the magic power of certain words and ceremonies uttered by priests, or other persons initiated into the necessary secret, descends to earth and performs miracles. This sort of magic is also exercised among Christian priests. They persuade their disciples that, by certain arbitrary actions, and certain movements of the body, they can oblige the God of Nature to suspend his laws, give himself up to their desires, and load them with every favour they choose to demand. Thus, in this religion, the priest assumes the right of commanding God himself. On this empire over their God, this real Theurgy, or mysterious commerce with heaven, are founded those puerile and ridiculous ceremonies which Christians call sacraments. We have already seen this Theurgy in Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. We find it, also, in penitence, or the power which the priests of some sects arrogate to themselves, of remitting, in the name of Heaven, all sins confessed to them. It is seen in orders, that is to say, in the ceremony which impresses on certain men a sacred character, by which they are ever after distinguished from profane mortals. It is seen in the rites and functions which torture the last moments of the dying. It is seen in marriage, which natural union, it is supposed, cannot meet with the approbation of Heaven,

Mexicans believe in a kind of transubstantiation, which is mentioned by father Acosta. See his Travels, chap. xxiv. The Protestants have had the courage to reject transubstantiation, although it is formally established by Christ, who says, "Take, eat; this is my body." Averoes said, "*Anima mea fit cum philosophia, non vero cum Christianis, gente stolidissima, qui Deum faciunt et comedunt.*" The Peruvians have a religious ceremony, in which, after sacrificing a lamb, they mingle his blood with flour, and distribute it amongst the people.—*Alnetanz Quest. lib. ii. cap. 20.*

unless the ceremony of a priest render it valid, and procure it the sanction of the Most High.¹

We see this Theurgy, or white magic, in the prayers, forms, liturgies, and, in short, in all the ceremonies of the Christians. We find it in their opinion, that words disposed in a certain manner can influence the will of God, and oblige him to change his immutable decrees. Its efficacy is seen in exorcisms, that is, ceremonies, in which, by means of a magic water and some mysterious words, it is pretended that evil spirits which infest mankind can be expelled. Holy water, which has taken the place of the *aqua lustralis* of the Romans, is believed by certain Christians to possess astonishing virtues. It renders sacred, places and things which were profane. In fine, the Christian Theurgy being employed by a pontiff in the consecration of a king, renders him more respectable in the eyes of men, and stamps him with a divine character.

Thus all is magic and mystery, all is incomprehensible, in a religion revealed by God himself, to enlighten the darkened understanding of mankind.

CHAP. X.

OF THE INSPIRED WRITINGS OF THE CHRISTIANS.

CHRISTIANS endeavour to prove the divine origin of their religion by certain writings, which they believe to be sacred, and to have been inspired by God himself. Let us then see if these writings do really exhibit marks of that wisdom, omniscience, and perfection which we attribute to the Divinity.

The Bible, every word of which Christians believe

¹ The number of Roman Catholic sacraments, seven; a cabalistic, magic, and mysterious number.

to have been dictated by inspiration, is composed of an incongruous collection of the sacred writings of the Hebrews, called the Old Testament; to which are added, a number of works, more recent indeed, but of equal inspiration, known by the name of the New Testament. At the head of this collection are five books which are attributed to Moses, who was, it is said, in writing them, the secretary of God. He therein goes back to the origin of things. He attempts to initiate us into the mystery of the creation of the world, of which he has only the most vague and confused ideas. He betrays at every word a profound ignorance of the laws of Nature. God, according to Moses, created the sun, which, in our planetary system, is the source of light, several days after he had created the light. God, who can be represented by no image, created man in his own image. He creates him male and female; but, soon forgetting what he had done, he creates woman from one of the ribs of the man. In one word, we see, at the very entrance of the Bible, nothing but ignorance and contradiction.¹ It appears, at once, that the cosmogony of the Hebrews is only a tissue of fables and allegories, incapable of giving any true idea of things, and calculated to please only a savage and ignorant people, destitute of science, and unqualified for reasoning. In the rest of the writings of Moses, we see little but a string of marvellous and improbable stories, and a mass of ridiculous and arbitrary laws. The author concludes with giving an account of his own death. The books posterior to Moses exhibit equal ignorance. Joshua stops the

¹ St. Augustin confesses that there is no way of preserving the true sense of the three first chapters of Genesis without wronging religion and attributing things to God which are unworthy of him; and declares, that recourse must be had to allegory. Aug. de Genesi, contra Machineos. Origen, also, grants, if we take the history of the Bible literally, it is absurd and contradictory.—Philos. p. 12.

sun, which did not move. Sampson, the Jewish Hercules, has strength to overthrow a temple.—But we should never finish the enumeration of the fables and falsehoods of these books, which are audaciously attributed to the Holy Ghost. The story of the Hebrews presents us only with a mass of tales, unworthy the gravity of history and the majesty of Divinity. Ridiculous to reason, it appears to have been invented only to amuse the credulity of a stupid and infant people.

This strange compilation is intermingled with obscure and unconnected oracles, with which different prophets have, from time to time, enriched Jewish superstition. Every thing in the Old Testament breathes enthusiasm, fanaticism, and delirium, often decorated with pompous language. There, every thing is to be found, except good sense, good logic, and reason, which seems to be absolutely excluded from the books which guide the conduct of the Hebrews and Christians.

We have already mentioned the abject, and often absurd ideas of God, which are exhibited in the Bible. In this book, all his conduct appears ridiculous. He blows hot and cold, and contradicts himself every moment. He acts imprudently, and then repents of what he had done. He supports with one hand, and destroys with the other. After having punished all the human race with death, for the sins of man, he declares, by Ezekiel, that he is just, and will not render children responsible for the iniquities of their fathers. He commands the Hebrews, by the mouth of Moses, to rob the Egyptians. In the decalogue, published by Moses, theft and murder are forbidden. In short, Jehovah, ever in contradiction with himself, varies with circumstances, preserves no uniformity of conduct, and is represented in the books, said to be inspired by his spirit, as a tyrant, which the most decided villain would blush to be.

When we cast our eyes over the New Testament,

there, also, we see nothing characteristic of that spirit of truth which is said to have dictated this work. Four historians, or fabulists, have written the marvelous history of the Messiah. Seldom agreeing with respect to the circumstances of his life, they sometimes contradict each other in the most palpable manner. The genealogy of Christ, given us by Matthew, differs widely from that given us by Luke. One of the Evangelists says, that Christ was carried into Egypt; whilst, by another, this event is not even hinted at. One makes the duration of his mission three years, while another represents it as only as many months. We do not find them at all better accord respecting the facts in general which they report. Mark says that Christ died at the third hour, that is to say, nine o'clock in the morning: John says, that he died at the sixth hour, that is, at noon. According to Matthew and Mark, the women who, after the death of Jesus, went to his sepulchre, saw only one angel; whereas, according to Luke and John, they saw two. These angels were, by some, said to be within the tomb; by others, without. Several of the miracles of Jesus are also differently reported by the Evangelists. This is likewise the case with his appearances after his resurrection. Ought not all these things to excite a doubt of the infallibility of the Evangelists, and the reality of their divine inspirations? What shall we say of the false and forged prophecies, applied to Christ in the gospel? Matthew pretends that Jeremy foretold that Christ should be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver; yet no such prophecy is to be found in Jeremiah. Nothing is more singular than the manner in which Christian divines evade these difficulties. Their solutions are calculated to satisfy only those who conceive it their duty to remain in blindness.¹ Every

¹ Jerome himself says, that the quotations of Matthew do not agree with the Greek version of the Bible. Erasmus is obliged to confess, that the Holy Spirit permitted the Apostles to go astray.

man of sense must feel, that all the industry and sophism on earth can never reconcile such palpable contradictions; and the efforts of interpreters serve only to shew the weakness of their cause. Is it, then, by subterfuges, subtilties, and falsehoods, that we are to render service to God?

We find equal errors and contradictions in the pompous gasconade and declamatory bombast of St. Paul. The epistles and harangues of this man, inspired by the Spirit of God, appear to be the enthusiastic ravings of a madman. The most laboured commentaries have, in vain, endeavoured to reconcile the contradictions with which his work are filled, and the inconsistency of his conduct, which sometimes favoured and sometimes opposed Judaism.¹ We do not find ourselves more enlightened by the works attributed to the other Apostles. It seems as if these persons, inspired by the Holy Ghost, came on the earth only to prevent their disciples from comprehending what they had been sent to teach them.

¹ St. Paul himself informs us, that he was ravished up to the third heaven. Why was he transported thither, and what did he learn by his journey? Things unspeakable, which no man could comprehend. What advantage are mankind to derive from all this? St. Paul, in the Acts of the Apostles, is guilty of a falsehood, in saying before the high-priest, that he is persecuted, because he is a Pharisee, and on account of the resurrection. Here are two untruths. First, because Paul was, at that time, the most zealous Apostle of the Christian religion, and consequently a Christian. Secondly, because the accusations brought against him did not refer to his opinion on resurrection. If we know that the Apostles sometimes wandered from the truth, how shall we believe them at others? Farther, we see this great Apostle continually changing his counsels and conduct. At Jerusalem, he point-blank opposes Peter, who favoured Judaism; whereas he himself afterwards complied with Jewish rites. In fine, he always accommodates himself to the circumstances of the time, and becomes all things to all men. He seems to have set an example to the Jesuits, of their conduct in the Indies, with which they are reproached, where they unite the worship of the Pagans to that of Christ.

At the foot of the collection, which forms the New Testament, we find the mystic work known by the name of the Revelation of St. John. This is an unintelligible thing, in which the author has endeavoured to collect and concentrate all the gloomy and dreadful ideas contained in the rest of the Bible. It exhibits to the wretched race of Man the awful and approaching end of a perishing world. It is filled with horrid pictures, by gazing on which, the trembling Christian becomes petrified with fear and wonder, indifferent to life, and useless, or an incumbrance to society. Thus, in a manner not unworthy of itself, terminates this compilation, so inestimable and adorable to Christians, so ridiculous and contemptible to the man of reason, so unworthy of a good and bounteous God ; so detestable to him who contemplates the unparalleled evils it has occasioned on the earth.

Having taken for the rule of their conduct and opinions a book so full of blasphemous fables and striking contradictions concerning God, Christians have never agreed in the interpretation of his will, or precisely known what he exacted from them. Thus they have made this obscure work a bone of contention, an inexhaustible source of quarrels, a common arsenal, where all contending parties have supplied themselves with arms for mutual destruction. Geometricians dispute not concerning the fundamental principles of their science. By what fatality does it happen that Christian revelation, the foundation of a religion on which depends the eternal felicity of man, should be unintelligible, subject to disputes, and often deluge the earth with blood ? To judge by effects, such a revelation ought rather to be thought the work of a malign spirit, a genius of darkness and falsehood, than of a God desirous to preserve, enlighten, and beautify mankind.

CHAP. XI.

OF CHRISTIAN MORALITY.

WERE we to believe Christians, there could have been no true morality on earth before the coming of the founder of their sect. They represent the world as having been plunged in darkness and vice at all times and places where Christ was unknown. Yet morality was always necessary to mankind; for, without it, no society can exist. We find, that before the time of Christ, there were flourishing and virtuous nations, and enlightened philosophers, who continually reminded mankind of their duties. The precepts of Socrates, Confucius, and the Gymnosophists of India, are by no means inferior to those of the Messiah of the Christians. We find, amongst heathens, innumerable instances of equity, humanity, temperance, disinterestedness, patience, and meekness, which flatly contradict the pretensions of the Christians, and prove that, before Christ was known on earth, virtues flourished, which were far more real than those he came to teach to men.

Was a supernatural revelation necessary to inform mankind that society cannot exist without virtue, and that, by the admission of vice, societies consent to their own destruction? Was it necessary that a God should speak, to shew that they have need of mutual aid and mutual love? Was assistance from on High necessary to discover that revenge is an evil, and an outrage upon the laws, which, when they are just, assume to themselves the right of retribution? Is not the forgiveness of injuries connected with this principle? And is not hatred eternalized where implacable revenge is exercised? Is not the pardoning of our enemies a greatness of soul, which gives us an advantage over those who offend us? When we do good to

our enemies does it not give us a superiority over them? Is not such conduct calculated to multiply our friends? Does not every man, who is desirous to live, perceive that vice, intemperance, and voluptuousness must shorten the period of life? Has not experience demonstrated to every thinking being, that vice is injurious and detestable, even to those who are not free from its empire, and that the practice of virtue is the only means of acquiring real esteem and love? However little mankind may reflect on what they themselves, their true interests, and the end of society are, they must feel what they ought to be to each other. Good laws will render them good; and where these exist, there is no need of flying to heaven for rules for the preservation and happiness of society. Reason is sufficient to teach us our duties to our fellow-creatures. What assistance can it receive from a religion by which it is continually contradicted and degraded?

It is said, that Christianity, far from counteracting morality, is its chief support, and renders its obligations more sacred, by giving them the sanction of God. In my opinion, however, the Christian religion, instead of supporting morality renders it weak and precarious. It cannot possibly have any solid foundation on the commands of a God, who is changing, partial, and capricious; and ordains with the same mouth, justice and injustice, concord and carnage, toleration and persecution. It is impossible to follow the precepts of a rational morality, under the empire of a religion, which makes a merit of the most destructive zeal, enthusiasm, and fanaticism. A religion, which commands us to imitate the conduct of a despot who delights to ensnare his creatures, who is implacable in his vengeance, and devotes to flaming destruction all who have the misfortune to displease him, is incompatible with all morality. The innumerable crimes with which the Christian, more than any other religion, has stained itself, have always been committed under the pretext of pleasing the ferocious God whom the

Christians have inherited from the Jews. The moral character of this God, must, of necessity, govern the moral conduct of those who adore him.

Hence arises the uncertainty of Christians, whether it be most conformable to the spirit of their religion to tolerate, or to persecute, those who differ from them in opinion. The two parties find themselves equally authorised in modes of conduct which are diametrically opposite. At one time, Jehovah declares his detestation of idolators, and makes it a duty to exterminate them; at another time Moses forbids his people to speak ill of the God of nations. The Son of God forbids persecution, after having said that men must be constrained to enter into his kingdom. Yet, as the idea of a severe and cruel God makes a much deeper impression than that of a bounteous one, true Christians have generally thought it their duty to exert their zeal against those whom they have supposed to be enemies to their God. They have imagined it impossible to offend him by espousing his cause with too much ardour. Toleration has seldom been practised, except by indolent and phlegmatic Christians, of a temperament little analogous to that of the God whom they serve.

Must not a true Christian, to whose imitation the examples of the saints and heroes of the Old Testament are proposed, become ferocious and sanguinary? Will he not find motives for cruelty in the conduct of Moses, who twice caused the blood of Israel to stream, and immolated to his God more than forty thousand victims? To justify his own, will he not appeal to the perfidious cruelty of Phineas, Jabel, and Judith? Will he not see David to be a monster of barbarity, adultery, and rebellion, which nevertheless does not prevent his being a man after God's own heart? In short, the whole Bible informs the Christian that his God is delighted with a furious zeal in his service; and this zeal is sufficient to close his eyes on every species of crime.

Let us not, then, be surprised to see Christians incessantly persecuting each other. If they are at any time tolerant, it is only when they are themselves persecuted, or too weak to persecute others. Whenever they have power they become the terror and destruction of each other. Since Christianity first appeared on earth, its different sects have incessantly quarrelled. They have mutually exercised the most refined cruelty. Sovereigns, in imitation of David, have espoused the quarrels of discordant priests, and served God by fire and sword. Kings themselves have often perished the victims of religious fanaticism, which tramples on every moral duty in obedience to its God.

In a word, the religion, which boasts of having brought peace on earth, and good will towards men; has for eighteen centuries caused more ravages, and greater effusions of blood, than all the superstitions of heathenism. It has raised walls of separation between the citizens of the same state. It has abandoned concord and affection from families. It has made a duty of injustice and inhumanity. The followers of a God, who was unjustly offended at mankind, became as unjust as he. The servants of a jealous and vindictive God, conceived it their duty to enter into his quarrels and avenge his injuries. Under a God of cruelty, it was judged meritorious to cause the earth to echo with groans, and float in blood.

Such are the important services which the Christian religion has rendered to morality. Let it not be said, that it is through a shameful abuse of this religion, that these horrors have happened. A spirit of persecution and intolerance is the spirit of a religion ordained by a God, jealous of his power, a God who has formally commanded the commission of murder; a God, who, in the excess of his anger, has not spared even his own Son! The servant of such a God is much surer to please him by exterminating his enemies, than by permitting them to offend him in peace. Such a God must necessarily serve as a pretext to the most de-

structive excesses. A zeal for his glory is used as a veil to conceal the passions of all impostors and fanatics who pretend to be interpreters of the will of heaven; and the enthusiastic hopes to wash away the greatest crimes by bathing his hands in the blood of the enemies of his God.

By a natural consequence of the same principles, an intolerant religion can be only conditionally submissive to the authority of temporal sovereigns. Jews and Christians cannot be obedient to a temporal government, unless its laws be conformed to the arbitrary and often ridiculous commands of their God. But who shall decide whether the laws, most advantageous to society, are conformed to the will of this God? Without doubt, his ministers, the confidants of his secrets and interpreters of his oracles. Thus, in a Christian state, the citizens must be subject rather to spiritual than temporal government, to the priest rather than the magistrate. Hence must arise civil war, bloodshed, proscription, and all that inspires the human breast with horror.

Such is the support afforded to morality by a religion, the first principle of which is to admit the God of the Jews, that is, a tyrant, whose fantastic commands annihilate every rule necessary to the tranquil existence of society. This God creates justice and injustice, his supreme will changes good into bad, and vice into virtue. His caprice overturns the laws which he himself had given to nature. He destroys at his pleasure the moral relations among mankind. In his own conduct he dispenses with all duties towards his creatures. He seems to authorise them to follow no certain laws, except those prescribed to them, in different circumstances, by the voice of his ministers and prophets. These, when in power, preach nothing but submission. If an attempt be made to abridge that power, they preach arms and rebellion. Are they weak? They preach toleration, patience, and meekness. Are they strong? They preach persecution,

revenge, rapine, and cruelty. They always find in Holy Writ arguments to authorise these different modes of conduct. They find in the oracles of their just and immutable God, arguments amply sufficient to justify actions diametrically opposite in their nature and offence. To lay the foundation of morality on such a God, or open books which contain laws so contradictory, is to give it an unstable base; it is to found it on the caprice of those who speak in the name of God; it is to found it on the temperament of each one of his adorers.

Morality should be founded upon invariable rules. A God who destroys these rules destroys his own work. If God be the creator of man, if he intends their happiness and preservation, he would have them to be just, humane, and benevolent, and averse to injustice, fanaticism, and cruelty.

From what has been said, we may see what we ought to think of those divines who pretend that, without the Christian religion there could be neither morality nor virtue among mankind. The converse of this proposition would much higher approach the truth; and it might be maintained, that every Christian who imitates his God, and practises all his commands, must necessarily be an immoral person. If it be said, that those commands are not always unjust, and that the Scriptures often breathe benevolence, harmony, and equity, I answer, Christians must have an inconstant morality, sometimes good and sometimes bad, according to interest and individuals. It appears that Christians must either be wholly destitute of true morality, or vibrate continually from virtue to vice, and from vice to virtue.

The Christian religion is but a rotten prop to morality. It will not bear examination, and every man who discovers its defects will be ready to believe that the morality founded on such a basis can be only a chimera. Thus we often behold men, who have couched the neck beneath the yoke of religion, break

loose at once and abandon themselves to debauchery, intemperance, and every kind of vice. Escaping from the slavery of superstition, they fly to complete anarchy, and disbelieve the existence of all moral duties, because they have found religion to be but a fable. Hence, among Christians, the words infidel and libertine have become synonymous. All these inconveniencies would be avoided, if mankind, instead of being taught a theological, were taught a natural morality. Instead of interdicting intemperance and vice, because they are offensive to God and religion, they should be prevented, by convincing man that they are destructive to his existence, and render him contemptible in society: that they are disapproved and forbidden by reason and nature, who aim at his preservation, and direct him to take the path that leads to permanent felicity. Whatever may be the will of God, and independently of the future rewards and punishments announced by religion, it is easy to prove to every man that it is, in this world, his interest to preserve his health, to respect virtue, acquire the esteem of his fellow-creatures, and, in fine, to be chaste, temperate, and virtuous. Those whose passions will not suffer them to attend to principles so clear and reasonable, will not be more docile to the voice of a religion, which they will cease to believe the moment it opposes their misguiding propensities.

-Let, then, the pretended advantages which the Christian religion lends morality be no longer boasted. The principles drawn from revelation tend to its destruction. We have frequent examples of Christian nations, whose morals are far more corrupted than those of people whom they style infidels and heathens. The former are, at least, most subject to religious fanaticism, a passion calculated to banish justice and all the social virtues from society.

Christianity creates intolerants and persecutors, who are much more injurious to society than the most abandoned debauchees. It is, at least, certain, that

the most Christian nations of Europe, are not those where true morality is most felt and practised. In Spain, Portugal, and Italy, where the most superstitious sect of Christians has fixed its residence, people live in the most shameful ignorance of their duties. Robbery, assassination, debauchery, and persecution, are there carried to their worst extreme; and yet all men are full of religion. Few virtuous men exist in those countries. Religion itself there becomes an accomplice to vice, furnishes criminals with an asylum, and procures to them easy means of reconciliation with God. Presents, prayers, and ceremonies, there furnish mankind with a dispensation from the practice of virtue. Amongst nations, who boast of possessing Christianity in all its purity, religion has so entirely absorbed the attention of its sectaries, that morality enters not into their thought; and they think they fulfil all their duties by a scrupulous observation of the minutiae of superstitious ceremonies, whilst they are strangers to all social affections, and labour for the destruction of human happiness.

CHAP. XII.

OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES.

WHAT has been said is sufficient to shew what we ought to think of Christian morality. If we examine the virtues recommended in the Christian religion, we find them but ill calculated for mankind. They lift him above his sphere, are useless to society, and often of dangerous consequence. In the boasted precepts, which Jesus Christ came to give mankind, we find little but extravagant maxims, the practice of which is impossible, and rules which, literally followed, must prove injurious to society. In those of his precepts

that are practicable, we find nothing which was not as well or better known to the sages of antiquity, without the aid of revelation.

According to the Messiah, the whole duty of man consists in loving God above all things, and his neighbour as himself. Is it possible to obey this precept? Can man love a God above all things, who is represented as wrathful, capricious, unjust, and implacable? who is said to be cruel enough to damn his creatures eternally? Can man love, above all things, an object the most dreadful that human imagination could ever conceive? Can such an object excite in the human heart a sentiment of love? How can we love that which we dread? How can we delight in the God under whose rod we tremble? Do we not deceive ourselves, when we think we love a being so terrible, and so calculated to excite nothing but horror?¹

Is it even practicable for mankind to love their neighbours as themselves? Every man naturally loves himself in preference to all others. He loves his fellow-creatures only in proportion as they contribute to his happiness. He exercises virtue in doing good to his neighbour. He acts generously when he sacrifices his self love to his love for another. Yet he will never love his fellow creatures but for the useful qualities he finds in them. He can love them no farther than they are known to him, and his love for them must ever be governed by the good he receives from them.

To love one's enemies is then impossible. A man may abstain from doing evil to the person by whom he is injured; but love is an affection which can be excited in our hearts only by an object which we supposed friendly to us. Politic nations, who have enacted just and wise laws, have always forbidden in-

¹ Seneca says, with much truth, that a man of sense cannot fear the Gods, because no man can love what he fears. *De Benef.* 4. The Bible says, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. I think it rather the beginning of folly.

dividuals to revenge, or do justice to themselves. A sentiment of generosity, of greatness of soul, or heroism, may induce mankind to do good to those from whom they suffer injuries. By such means they exalt themselves above their enemies, and may even change the disposition of their hearts. Thus, without having recourse to a supernatural morality, we feel that it is our interest to stifle in our hearts the lust of revenge. Christians may, therefore, cease to boast the forgiveness of injuries, as a precept that could be given only by their God, and which proves the divine origin of their morality. Pythagoras, long before the time of Christ, had said, let men revenge themselves upon their enemies, only by labouring to convert them into friends. Socrates taught that it was not lawful for a man, who had received an injury, to revenge it by doing another injury.

Christ must have forgotten that he spoke to men, when, in order to conduct them to perfection, he commanded them to abandon their possessions to the avidity of the first who should demand them; to turn the other cheek to receive a new insult; to oppose no resistance to the most outrageous violence; to renounce the perishable riches of this world; to forsake houses, possessions, relations, and friends to follow him; and to reject even the most innocent pleasures. Who does not see, in these sublime precepts, the language of enthusiasm and hyperbole? Are not they calculated to discourage man, and throw him into despair? If literally practised, would they not prove ruinous to society?

What shall we say of the morality, which commands the human heart to detach itself from objects which reason commands it to love? When we refuse the blessings offered us by nature, do we not despise the benefactions of the One Supreme? What real good can result to society from the melancholy and ferocious virtues which Christians consider indispensable? Can a man continue useful to society, when his

mind is perpetually agitated with imaginary terrors, gloomy ideas, and black inquietudes, which incapacitate him for the performance of his duties to his family, his country, and mankind? If the Christian adhere strictly to the gloomy principles of his religion, must he not become equally insupportable to himself, and those by whom he is surrounded?

It cannot be said, that, in general, fanaticism and enthusiasm are the bases of the morality of Christ. The virtues which he recommends tend to render men unsocial, to plunge them into melancholy, and often to render them injurious to their fellow-creatures. Among human beings, human virtues are necessary; Christian virtues are not calculated on the scale of real life. Society has need of real virtues, from which it may derive energy, activity, and support. Vigilance, labour, and affection, are necessary to families. A desire of enjoying lawful pleasures, and augmenting the sum of their happiness, is necessary to all mankind. The Christian religion is perpetually busied in degrading mankind by threatening them with dismaying terrors, or diverting them with frivolous hopes; sentiments equally proper to turn them from their true duties. If the Christian literally obey the precepts of his legislator, he will ever be either an useless or injurious member of society.¹

¹ Notwithstanding the eulogies lavished by Christians on the precepts of their divine master, some of them are wholly contrary to equity and right reason. When Jesus says, make to yourselves friends in heaven with the mammon of unrighteousness, does he not plainly insinuate, that we may take from others wherewithal to give alms to the poor? Divines will say that he spoke in parables; these parables are, however, easily unfolded. In the mean time, this precept is but too well followed. Many Christians cheat and swindle during all their lives, to have the pleasure of making donations at their death to churches, monasteries, &c. The Messiah, at another time, treated his mother, who with parental solicitude was seeking him, extremely ill. He commands his disciples to steal an ass. He drowns an herd of swine, &c. It must be confessed, these things do not agree extremely well with good morality.

What real advantage can mankind derive from those ideal virtues, which Christians style evangelic, divine, &c. and which they prefer to the social, humane, and substantial virtues, and without which they pretend no man can please God, or enter into his glory? Let us examine those boasted virtues in detail. Let us see of what utility they are to society, and whether they truly merit the preference which is given them, to those which are pointed out by reason as necessary to the welfare of mankind.

The first of the Christian virtues is faith, which serves as a foundation for all the others. It consists in an impossible conviction of the revealed doctrines and absurd fables which the Christian religion commands its disciples to believe. Hence it appears that this virtue exacts a total renunciation of reason, and impracticable assent to improbable facts; and a blind submission to the authority of priests, who are the only guarantees of the truth of the doctrines and miracles that every Christian must believe under penalty of damnation.

This virtue, although necessary to all mankind, is, nevertheless, a gift of Heaven, and the effect of a special grace. It forbids all doubt and enquiry; and it deprives man of the liberty of exercising his reason and reflection. It reduces him to the passive acquiescence of beasts in matters which he is, at the same time, told are of all things the most important to his happiness. Hence it is plain, that faith is a virtue invented by men, who, shrinking from the light of reason, deceived their fellow-creatures, to subject them to their own authority, and degraded them that they might exercise an empire over them. If faith be a virtue, it is certainly useful only to the spiritual guides of the Christians, for they alone gather its fruits. It cannot but be injurious to other men, who are taught by it to despise that reason, which distinguishes them from brutes, and is their only faithful guide in this world. Christians, however, represent this reason as

perverted, and an unfaithful guide; by which they seem to intimate that it was not made for reasonable beings. May we not, however, ask them how far this renunciation of reason ought to be carried? Do not they themselves, in certain cases, have recourse to reason? Do they not appeal to reason, when they endeavour to prove the existence of their God?

Be this as it may, it is an absurdity to say we believe that of which we have no conception. What, then, are the motives of the Christian, for pretending to such a belief? His confidence in his spiritual guides. But what is the foundation of this confidence? Revelation. On what, then, is Revelation itself founded? On the authority of spiritual guides. Such is the manner in which Christians reason. Their arguments in favour of faith are comprised in the following sentence. To believe our religion it is necessary to have faith, and to have faith you must believe in our religion. Or, it is necessary to have faith already, in order to believe in the necessity of faith.¹

The phantom Faith vanishes at the approach of the sun of Reason. It can never sustain a calm examination. Hence it arises, that certain Christian divines are so much at enmity with science. The founder of their religion declared, that his law was made for ignorant men and children. Faith is the effect of a grace which God seldom grants to enlightened persons, who are accustomed to consult their reason. It is adapted only to the minds of men who are incapable of re-

¹ Many divines have maintained, that faith without works is sufficient for salvation. This is the virtue which is, in general, most cried up by them. It is, at least, the one most necessary to their existence. It is not, therefore, surprising that they have endeavoured to establish it by fire and sword. It was for the support of faith that the Inquisition burned heretics and Jews. Kings and priests persecute for the establishment of faith. Christians have destroyed those who were destitute of faith, in order to demonstrate to them their error. O wondrous virtue, and worthy of the God of mercies! His ministers punish mankind, when he refuses them his grace!!!

flection, rendered insane by enthusiasm, or invincibly attached to the prejudices of childhood. Science must ever be at enmity with this religion ; for in proportion as either of them gains ground, the other must lose.

Another Christian virtue, proceeding from the former, is Hope. Founded on the flattering promises given by this religion to those who render themselves wretched in this life, it feeds their enthusiasm. It induces them firmly to believe that God will reward, in heaven, their gloominess, inutility, indolence, prayers, and detestation of pleasures on earth. How can a man, who, being intoxicated with these pompous hopes, becomes indifferent to his own happiness, concern himself with that of his fellow-creatures ? The Christian believes that he pleases his God by rendering himself miserable in this life ; and however flattering his hopes may be for the future, they are here empoisoned by the idea of a jealous God, who commands him to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling, and who will plunge him into eternal torture, if he for a moment has the weakness to be a man.

Another of the Christian virtues is Charity. It consists in loving God and our neighbour. We have always seen how difficult, not to say impossible, it is to feel sentiments of tenderness for any being whom we fear. It will, undoubtedly, be said, that the fear of Christians is a filial fear. But words cannot change the essence of things. Fear is a passion totally opposite to love. A son, who fears the anger, and dreads the caprices of a father, can never love him sincerely. The love, therefore, of a Christian to his God can never be true. In vain he endeavours to feel sentiments of tenderness for a rigorous master, at whose idea his heart shrinks back in terror. He can never love him but as a tyrant, to whom his mouth renders the homage that his heart refuses. The devotee is not honest to himself, when he pretends to love his God. His affection is a dissembled homage, like that which men are forced to render to certain inhuman despots,

who, while they tread their subjects in the dust, demand from them the exterior marks of attachment. If some tender minds, by force of illusion, feel sentiments of divine love, it is then a mystic and romantic passion, produced by a warm temperament, and an ardent imagination, which present their God to them dressed in smiles, with all his imputed faults concealed.¹ The love of God is not the least incomprehensible mystery of this religion.

Charity, considered as the love of mankind, is a virtuous and necessary disposition. It then becomes no more than that tender humanity which attaches us to our fellows, and inclines us to love and assist them. But how shall we reconcile this attachment with the commands of a jealous God, who would have us to love none but himself, and who came to separate the friend from the friend, and the son from the father? According to the precepts of the gospel, it would be criminal to offer God a heart shared by an earthly object. It would be idolatry thus to confound the creature with the Creator. And further, how can the Christian love beings who continually offend his God? Beings who would continually betray himself into offence? How can he love sinners? Experience teaches us that the devout, obliged by principle to hate themselves, have very little more affection for others. If this be not the case, they have not arrived at the perfection of divine love. We do not find that those, who are supposed to love the Creator most ar-

¹ It is an ardent and tender temperament that produces mystic devotion. Hysterical women are those who commonly love God with most vivacity, they love him to distraction, as they would love a man. In monasteries, particularly Ste. Therese, Madeleine de Pazzi, Marie a la Coque, most of the devotees are of this description. Their imagination grows wild, and they give to their God, whom they paint in the most captivating colours, that tenderness which they are not permitted to bestow on beings of their own species. It requires a strong imagination to be smitten with an object unknown.

dently, shew much affection for his creatures. On the contrary, we see them fill with bitterness all who surround them; they criticise with severity the faults of others, and make it a crime to speak of human frailty with indulgence.¹ A sincere love for God must be accompanied with zeal. A true Christian must be enraged when he sees his God offended. He must arm himself with a just and holy severity to repress the offenders. He must have an ardent desire to extend the empire of his religion. A zeal, originating in this divine love, has been the source of the terrible persecutions of which Christians have so often been guilty. Zeal produces murderers as well as martyrs. It is this zeal that prompts intolerant man to wrest the thunder from the hand of the Most High, to avenge him of his enemies. It is this zeal that causes members of the same state, and the same family, to detest and torment each other for opinions, and puerile ceremonies, which they are led to esteem as of the last importance. It is this zeal that has a thousand times kindled those religious wars so remarkable for their atrocity. Finally, it is this zeal for religion which justifies calumny, treason, carnage, and, in short, the disorders most fatal to society. It has always been considered as lawful to employ artifice, falsehood, and force, in support of the cause of God. The most choleric and corrupted men are commonly the most zealous. They hope that, for the sake of their zeal, Heaven will pardon the depravity of their manners, be it ever so excessive.

It is from an effect of the same zeal that enthusiastic Christians fly over every sea and continent to extend the empire of their God and make new prose-

¹ Devotees are generally considered as scourges of society. A devout woman has seldom the talent of conciliating the love of her husband and his domestics. A gloomy and melancholy religion cannot render its disciples very amiable. A sad and sullen monarch must have sad and sullen subjects. Christians have judiciously remarked, that Jesus Christ wept, but never smiled.

lytes. Stimulated by this zeal, missionaries go to trouble the repose of what they call heathen nations, whilst they would be astonished and enraged to find missionaries from those nations endeavouring to propagate a new religion in their country.¹

When these propagators of the faith have had power in their hands, they have excited the most horrid rebellions; and have, in conquered countries, exercised cruelties calculated only to render the God detestable whom they pretended to serve. They have thought that men who have so long been strangers to their God could be little better than beasts; and, therefore, judged it lawful to exercise every kind of violence over them. In the eyes of a Christian, an infidel is seldom worthier than a dog.

It is apparently in imitation of the Jews that Christian nations have usurped the possessions of the inhabitants of the new world. The Castilians and Portuguese had the same right to the possession of America and Africa, that the Hebrews had to make themselves masters of the land of Canaan, and exterminate its inhabitants, or reduce them to slavery. Have not Popes arrogated the right of disposing of distant empires to their favourite Monarchs in Europe? These manifest violations of the law of nature and of nations appeared just to those Christian Princes, in favour of whom religion sanctified avarice, cruelty, and usurpation.²

¹ Kambi, Emperor of China, asked the Jesuit missionaries at Peking, what they would say, if he should send missionaries to their nation. The revolts excited by the Jesuits in Japan and Ethiopia are well known. A holy missionary has been heard to say, that without muskets, missionaries could never make proselytes.

² St. Augustin says, that of right divine, all things belong to the just. A maxim which is founded on a passage in the Psalms, which says, the just shall eat the fruit of the labour of the unrighteous. It is known that the Pope, by a bull given in favour of the kings of Castile, Arragon, and Portugal, fixed the line of demarcation which was to rule the conquests which each had gained over the infidels. After such principles, is not the whole earth to become a prey to Christian rapacity?

Humility is, also, considered by Christians as a sublime virtue, and of inestimable value. No supernatural and divine revelations are necessary to teach us that pride does not become man, and that it renders him disagreeable to others. All must be convinced, on a moment's reflection, that arrogance, presumption, and vanity, are disgusting and contemptible qualities. But Christian humility is carried to a more refined extreme. The Christian must renounce his reason, mistrust his virtues, refuse to do justice to his own good actions, and repress all self-esteem, however well merited. Whence it appears, that this pretended virtue only degrades and debases man in his own eyes, deprives him of all energy, and stifles in him every desire of rendering himself useful to society. To forbid mankind to esteem themselves and merit the esteem of others, is to break the only powerful string that inclines them to study, industry, and noble actions. This Christian virtue is calculated only to render them abject slaves, wholly useless to the world, and make all virtue give place in them, to a blind submission to their spiritual guides.

Let us not be surprised, that a religion which boasts of being supernatural should endeavour to unnaturalize man. This religion, in the delirium of its enthusiasm, forbids mankind to love themselves. It commands them to hate pleasures and court grief. It makes a merit of all voluntary evils they do unto themselves. Hence those austerities and penances so destructive to health; those extravagant mortifications, cruel privations, and gradual suicides, by which fanatic Christians think they merit heaven. It must be confessed, all Christians do not feel themselves capable of such marvellous perfections, but all believe themselves more or less obliged to mortify the flesh, and renounce the blessings prepared for them by a bounteous God, who, they suppose, offers his good things only that they may be refused, and would be offended should his creatures presume to touch them.

Reason cannot approve virtues which are destructive to ourselves, nor admit a God who is delighted when mankind render themselves miserable, and voluntarily submit to torments. Reason and experience, without the aid of superstition, are sufficient to prove, that passions and pleasures, pushed to excess, destroy us ; and that the abuse of the best things becomes a real evil. Nature herself inculcates upon us the privation of things which prove injurious to us. A being, solicitous for his own preservation, must restrain irregular propensities, and fly whatever tends to his destruction. It is plain, that by the Christian religion, suicide is, at least, indirectly authorised.

It was in consequence of these fanatical ideas that, in the earliest ages of Christianity, the forests and deserts were peopled with perfect Christians, who by flying from the world, left their families destitute of support, and their country of citizens, to abandon themselves to an idle and contemplative life. Hence those legions of monks and cenobites, who, under the standards of different enthusiasts, have enrolled themselves into a militia, burthensome and injurious to society. They thought to merit heaven, by burying talents, which might be serviceable to their fellow-citizens, and vowing a life of indolence and celibacy. Thus, in nations which are the most faithful to Christianity, a multitude of men render themselves useless and wretched all their lives. What heart is so hard as to refuse a tear to the lot of the hapless victims taken from that enchanting sex which was destined to give happiness to our own ! Unfortunate dupes of youthful enthusiasm, or sacrificed to the ambitious views of imperious families, they are for ever exiled from the world ! They are bound by rash oaths to unending slavery and misery. Engagements, contradicted by every precept of nature, force them to perpetual virginity. It is in vain that riper feelings, sooner or later, warm their breasts, and make them groan under the weight of their imprudent vows. They regret their

voluntary sterility, and find themselves forgotten in society. Cut off from their families, and subjected to troublesome and despotic gaolers, they sink into a life of disgust, of bitterness, and tears. In fine, thus exiled from society, thus unrelated and unbeloved, there only remains for them the shocking consolation of seducing other victims to share with them the torments of their solitude and mortifications.

The Christian religion seems to have undertaken to combat nature and reason in every thing. If it admits some virtues, approved by reason, it always carries them to a vicious excess. It never observes that just mean, which is the point of perfection. All illicit and shameful pleasures will be avoided by every man, who is desirous of his own preservation, and the esteem of his fellow-creatures. 'The heathens knew and taught this truth, notwithstanding the depravity of morals with which they are reproached by Christians.' The church even recommends celibacy as a state of perfection, and considers the natural tie of marriage as an approach to sin. God, however, declares in Genesis, that it is not good for man to be alone. He also formally commanded all creatures to increase and multiply. His Son, in the gospel, comes to annul those laws. He teaches that, to attain to perfection, it is necessary to avoid marriage, and resist the strongest desire with which the breast of man is inspired—that of perpetuating his existence by a posterity, and providing supports for his old age and infirmities.

If we consult reason, we find, that the pleasures of love are always injurious when taken in excess ; and

¹ Aristotle and Epictetus recommended chastity of speech. Menander said, that a good man could never consent to debauch a virgin or commit adultery. Tibullus said, *casta placent superis*. Mark Anthony thanks the Gods, that he had preserved his chastity in his youth. The Romans made laws against adultery. Father Tachard informs us, that the Sissians forbid not only dishonest actions, but also impure thoughts and desires. Whence it appears, that chastity and purity of manners were esteemed even before the Christian religion existed.

that they are always criminal when they prove injurious. We shall perceive, that to debauch a woman is to condemn her to distress and infamy, and annihilate to her all the advantages of society ; that adultery is destructive to the greatest felicity of human life, conjugal union. Hence we shall be convinced, that marriage, being the only means of satisfying our desire of increasing the species and providing filial supports, is a state far more respectable and sacred, than the destructive celibacy and voluntary castration recommended as a virtue by the Christian religion.

Nature, or its author, invites man, by the attraction of pleasure, to multiply himself. He has unequivocally declared, that women are necessary to men. Experience shews, that they are formed for society, not solely for the purpose of a transient pleasure, but to give mutual assistance in the misfortunes of life, to produce and educate children, form them into citizens, and provide in them support for themselves in old age. In giving man superior strength, nature has pointed out his duty of labouring for the support of his family ; the weaker organs of his companion are destined to functions less violent, but not less necessary. In giving her a soul more soft and sensible, nature has, by a tender sentiment, attached her more particularly to her children. Such are the sure bands which the Christian religion would tear asunder. Such the blessings it would wrest from man, while it substitutes in their place an unnatural celibacy, which renders man selfish and useless, depopulates society, and which can be advantageous only to the odious policy of some Christian priests, who, separating from their fellow-citizens, have formed a destructive body, which eternalizes itself without posterity. *Gens æterna in qua nemo nascitur.*

If this religion has permitted marriage to some sects, who have not the temerity to soar to the highest pinnacle of perfection, it seems to have sufficiently punished them for this indulgence, by the unnatural

shackles it has fixed on the connubial state. Thus, among them, we see divorce forbidden, and the most wretched unions indissoluble. Persons once married, are forced to groan under the weight of wedlock, even when affection and esteem are dead, and the place of these essentials to conjugal happiness is supplied by hatred and contempt. Temporal laws also conspiring with religion, forbid the wretched prisoners to break their chains. It seems as if the Christian religion exerted all its powers to make us view marriage with disgust, and give the preference to a celibacy which is pregnant with debauchery, adultery, and dissolution. Yet the God of the Hebrews made divorce lawful, and and I know not by what right his Son, who came to accomplish the law of Moses, revoked an indulgence so reasonable.

Such are the perfections which Christianity inculcates on her children, and such the virtues she prefers to those which are contemptuously styled human virtues. She even rejects these, and calls them false and sinful, because their possessors are, forsooth, not filled with faith. What! the virtues of Greece and Rome, so amiable, and so heroic, were they not true virtues? If justice, humanity, generosity, temperance, and patience be not virtues, to what can the name be given? And are the virtues less because professed by heathens? Are not the virtues of Socrates, Cato, Epictetus, and Antonine, real and preferable to the zeal of the Cyrills, the obstinacy of Athanasius, the uselessness of Anthony, the rebellion of Chrysostom, the ferocity of Dominic, and the meanness of Francis?

All the virtues admitted by Christians, are either overstrained and fanatic, tending to render man useless, abject, and miserable; or obstinate, haughty, cruel, and destructive to society. Such are the effects of a religion, which contemning the earth, hesitates not to overwhelm it with trouble, provided it thereby heightens the triumph of its God over his enemies. No true morality can ever be compatible with such a religion.

CHAP. XIII.

OF THE PRACTICE AND DUTIES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

IF the Christian virtues be destitute of solidity, and produce no effect which reason can approve, we shall find nothing more estimable in a multitude of incommodious, useless, and often dangerous practices, which Christians consider as their sacred duties, and by means of which they are confident of obtaining the pardon and favour of God, and an eternal abode with him in unspeakable glory and felicity.

The first and most essential duty of Christians is prayer. To continual prayer their religion attaches its felicity. Their God, whom they suppose to be overflowing with bounty, refuses to bestow his blessings unsolicited. He grants them only to importunity. Sensible to flattery, like the kings of the earth, he exacts an etiquette, and hears no petitions unless they are presented in a certain form. What should we say of a father who, knowing the wants of his children, should refuse to give them necessary food, until wearied out with fervent supplications? But in another view, does not it imply mistrust of the wisdom of God to prescribe rules for his conduct? Does it not imply a doubt of his immutability, to believe he can be prevailed on by his creatures to alter his designs? If he knows all things, what need is there of continually informing him what are the dispositions and desires of his subjects? If he is almighty, how can he be flattered with the submissions, adorations, and formalities with which Christians prostrate themselves before him?

In one word, prayer supposes a capricious God, deficient in memory, voracious of praise, fond of seeing his creatures abased in the dust, and anxious to receive at every instant the most abject marks of their submission.

Can these ideas, borrowed from earthly princes, be with propriety applied to an omnipotent Being, who created the universe for man, and desires only that he should be happy? Can it be supposed that such a Being, without equal and without rival, should be jealous of his glory? Can the prayers of man add glory to a Being beyond comparison superior to all others? Cannot Christians see, that, in endeavouring to honour and exalt their God, they only degrade and debase him?

It is also the opinion of Christians, that the prayers of one man may be serviceable to others. Partial to his favourites, God hears petitions only from their lips. He listens not to his people, unless their prayers be offered up to him through his ministers. He becomes a sultan, accessible only to his ministers, vizirs, eunuchs, and the women of his seraglio. Hence the millions of priests and cenobites, who have no business on earth but to raise their idle hands to Heaven, and pray night and day for its blessings on society. Nations pay dearly for these important services, and these pious impostors live in splendour and ease, while real merit, labour, and industry languish in misery.

Under the pretence of devoting himself to prayer and other ceremonies of his worship, the Christian, particularly in some of the more superstitious sects, is obliged to remain idle, and stand with arms across during a great part of the year. He is persuaded that he honours God by his inutility. Feasts and fasts, multiplied by the interests of priests and the credulity of the people, often suspended for long intervals the labours necessary to the subsistence of society. Men fly to temples to pray when they should stay at home and cultivate their fields. There their eyes are fed with childish ceremonies, and their ears are filled with fables and doctrines, of which they can comprehend nothing. This tyrannical religion makes it a crime for the poor labourer to endeavour, during consecrated days, to procure subsistence for a numerous and indi-

gent family. And civil authority, in concert with religion, punishes those who have the audacity to earn bread, instead of praying or being idle.

Can reason subscribe to the ridiculous obligation of abstaining from certain aliments and meats which is imposed by some sects of Christians? In consequence of these laws, people, who live by their labour, are forced to content themselves, during long intervals, with dear and unwholesome provisions, more proper to generate disease than repair strength.

What object and ridiculous ideas must they entertain of God, who believe he can be offended by the quality of the food that enters into the stomachs of his creatures! Heaven, however, for a certain sum of money becomes sometimes more accommodating. Priests have been continually busied in straitening the path of their sectaries, that they might transgress more frequently; and that the revenue arising from their transgressions might thus become more ample. All things, even sin itself, among Christians, contribute to the profit of the priests.

No religion ever placed its sectaries in more complete and continual dependance on priests, than the Christian. Those harpies never lose sight of their prey. They take infallible measures for subjecting mankind, and making all contribute to their power, riches, and dominion. Having assumed the office of mediator between the heavenly monarch and his subjects, these priests were looked upon as courtiers in favour, ministers commissioned to exercise power in his name, and favourites to whom he could refuse nothing. Thus they became absolute masters of the destiny of the Christians. They gained establishments and rendered themselves necessary by the introduction of innumerable practices and duties, which, though puerile and ridiculous, they had the address to make their flocks look upon as indispensibly necessary to their salvation. They represented the omission of these pretended duties as a crime infinitely greater

than an open violation of all the laws of morality and reason.

Let us not then be surprized, that, in the most zealous, that is to say the most superstitious sects, we see mankind perpetually infested with priests. Scarcely are they born, when, under the pretext of washing away original sin, their priests impose on them a mercenary baptism, and pretend to reconcile them with a God whom they have as yet been unable to offend. By means of a few words and magical ceremonies they are thus snatched from the dominion of Satan. From the tenderest infancy their education is frequently entrusted to priests, whose principal care is to instil into them early the prejudices as necessary to the views of the church. Terrors are now introduced into their minds which increase during their whole lives. They are instructed in the fables, absurd doctrines, and incomprehensible mysteries of a marvellous religion. In one word, they are formed into superstitious Christians, and rendered incapable of being useful citizens or enlightened men. Only one thing is represented to them as necessary, which is to be in all things devoutly submissive to his religion. "Be devout," say his teachers, "be blind, despise thy reason, attend to Heaven, and neglect earth; this is all thy God demands to conduct thee to eternal felicity."

To maintain the abject and fanatic ideas with which the priest has filled his pupils in their childhood, he commands them to come frequently, and deposit in his bosom their hidden faults, their most secret actions and thoughts. He obliges them to humiliate themselves at his feet, and render homage to his power. He frightens the criminals, and afterwards, if they are judged worthy, he reconciles them to God, who on the command of his ministers remits their sins. The Christian sects that admit this practice, boast of it as extremely useful in regulating the manners and restraining the passions of men; but experience proves, that the countries in which this usage is most faithfully

observed, are distinguished rather for the dissolution than the purity of their manners. By such easy expiations they are only emboldened in vice. The lives of Christians are circles of successive offences and confessions. The priesthood reap the profit of this practice, by means of which they exercise an absolute dominion over the consciences of mankind. How great must be the power of an order of men, who possess all the secrets of families, can kindle at pleasure the destructive flame of fanaticism, and open or shut the gates of heaven!

Without the consent of his priests, the Christian cannot participate the knowledge of the mysteries of his religion, from which they have a right to exclude him entirely. This privation, however, he has no great reason to lament. But the anathemas or excommunications of the priests generally do a real mischief to mankind. These spiritual punishments produce temporal effects, and every citizen who incurs the disgrace of the church is in danger of that of the government, and becomes odious to his fellow-citizens.

We have already remarked that priests have taken upon themselves the management of marriages. Without their consent, a Christian cannot become a father. He must first submit to the capricious formalities of his religion, without which his children must be excluded from the rank of citizens.

During all his life, the Christian is obliged to assist in the ceremonies of worship under the direction of his priests. When he has performed this important duty, he esteems himself the favourite of God, and persuades himself that he no longer owes any thing to society. Thus frivolous practices take place of morality, which is always rendered subordinate to religion.

When death approaches, the Christian, stretched in agony on his bed, is still assailed in those distressful moments by priests. In some sects religion seems to have been invented to render the bitter death of man ten thousand times more bitter. A malicious priest

comes to the couch of the dying man, and holds before him the spectacle of his approaching end, arrayed in more than all its terrors. Although this custom is destructive to citizens, it is extremely profitable to the priesthood,¹ who owe much of their riches to legacies procured by it. Morality is not quite so highly advantaged by it. Experience proves, that most Christians live in security and postpone till death their reconciliation with God. By means of a late repentance, and largesses to the priesthood, their faults are expiated, and they are permitted to hope that Heaven will forget the accumulated crimes of a long and wicked life.

Death itself does not terminate the empire of the priesthood in certain sects, which finds means to make money even out of the dead bodies of their followers. These, for a sufficient sum, are permitted to be deposited in temples, where they have the privilege of spreading infection and disease. The sacerdotal power extends still further. The prayers of the church are purchased at a dear rate, to deliver the souls of the dead from their pretended torments in the other world, inflicted for their purification. Happy they who are rich in a religion, whose priests being favourites with God, can be hired to prevail on him to remit the punishments which his immutable justice had intended to inflict !

Such are the principal duties recommended by the Christians ; and upon the observation of these they believe their salvation to depend. Such are the arbitrary, ridiculous, and hurtful practices substituted for the real duties of morality. We shall not combat the different superstitious practices, admitted by some sects and rejected by others ; such as the honours rendered to the memory of those pious fanatics and obscure contemplators whom Roman pontiffs have ranked among the saints. We say nothing of those pilgrimages which superstition has so often produced, nor

¹ In Catholic countries.

those indulgences by means of which sins are remitted. We shall only observe, that these things are commonly more respected where they are admitted, than the duties of morality, which in those places frequently are wholly unknown. Mankind find their natural propensities much less thwarted by such rites, ceremonies, and practices, than by being virtuous. A good Christian is a man who conforms exactly to all that his priests exact from him; these substitute blindness and submission in the place of all virtues.

CHAP. XIV.

OF THE POLITICAL EFFECTS OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

AFTER having seen the inutility and even danger of the perfections, virtues, and duties proposed by the Christian religion, let us enquire whether its political influences be more happy, and whether it can in reality promote the welfare of nations among whom it is established and faithfully observed. We at once find, that wherever this religion is admitted, two opposite legislations, ever at variance with each other, establish themselves. Although this religion preaches love and peace, it soon annihilates the effects of those precepts by the divisions which it necessarily sows among its sectaries, who unavoidably interpret diversely the ambiguous oracles announced in Holy Writ. We find, that from the infancy of religion the most acrimonious disputes have continually taken place among divines. The successive ages of Christianity have been stained with schisms, heresies, persecutions, and contests, widely discordant from its boasted spirit of peace and concord; which is in fact incompatible with a religion whose precepts are so dark and equivocal. In all religious disputes, each party believes that God is on its

side, and consequently they are obstinate. Indeed, how can it be otherwise, when they confound the cause of God with that of their own vanity? Thus, mutually averse to concession, they quarrel and fight until force has decided a contest in which they never appeal to reason. In fact, political authorities have ever been forced to interfere in all the dissensions which have arisen among Christians. Governments have always taken in the frivolous disputes of priests, and foolishly considered them as objects of the last importance. They have conceived, that in a religion established by God himself there could be nothing of a trifling nature. Thus, princes have armed themselves against their own subjects, whose opinions differed from theirs. The way of thinking at court has decided the creed and the faith of subjects. Opinions supported by kings and priests have been the only true ones. Their creatures have been the guardians of orthodoxy, and were commissioned to exterminate all whom they chose to denominate heretics and rebels.

The prejudices of princes or their false policy, have caused them to look upon those of their subjects, who differ from themselves in religious opinions, as bad citizens, dangerous to the state, and enemies to their power. If, leaving to priests the business of finishing their own impertinent disputes, they had not assisted their quarrels and persecutions, they would have died away of themselves, and never have disturbed the peace of nations. If those kings had impartially recompensed the good and punished the bad, without regard to their worship, ceremonies, and speculative opinions, they would not have made many of their subjects such enemies to that power, by which they found themselves oppressed. Christians have always attempted to reclaim heretics by injustice, violence, and persecution. Ought not they to have perceived, that this conduct was calculated only to produce hypocrites and hidden enemies, or open rebellions?

But these reflections are not designed for princes,

who, from their infancy, have been filled with fanaticism and prejudices. They, instead of being actuated by virtuous motives, have formed obstinate attachments to frivolities, and impetuous ardour for doctrines foreign to the welfare of their states, and a boundless wrath against all who refuse to bend to their despotic opinions. Such sovereigns find it a shorter way to destroy mankind than reclaim them by mild means. Their haughty despotism will not condescend to reason. Religion assures them that tyranny is lawful, and cruelty meritorious when they are employed in the cause of heaven.

The Christian religion, in fact, always makes despots and tyrants of all the sovereigns by whom it is adopted. It represents them as gods upon earth; it causes their very caprices to be respected as the will of heaven itself. It delivers mankind into their hands as an herd of slaves, of whom they may dispose at their pleasure. In return for their zeal for religion, all the outrages upon justice that they can commit are forgiven, and their subjects are commanded, under pain of the wrath of the Most High, to submit without a murmur to the sword that strikes instead of protecting themselves. It is not, therefore, matter of surprise, that since the establishment of this religion, we see so many nations groaning under devout tyrants, who, although obstinately attached to religion, have been unjust, licentious, and cruel. Whatever were the oppressions and ravages of these religious or hypocritical princes, the priests have not failed to preach submission to their subjects. On the other hand, let us not be surprised to see so many weak and wicked princes, support in their turns the interest of a religion, which their false policy judged necessary to the maintenance of their authority. If kings were enlightened, just and virtuous, and knew and practised their real duties, they would have had no need of the aid of superstition in governing nations. But as it is more easy to conform to rites than to acquire talents

or practise virtue, this religion has, in princes, too often found support for itself, and destruction for its enemies.

The ministers of religion have not had the same complaisance for princes, who refused to make a common cause with them, espouse their quarrels, and become subservient to their passions. They have arisen against those who have thwarted their views, punished their excesses, touched their immunities, endeavoured to subject them to reason, or repress their ambitious designs. The priests on such occasions, cry out, Impiety! Sacrilege! Then they pretend that the sovereign puts his hand to the censor, and usurps the rights granted them by God himself. Then they endeavour to excite nations to rebellion. They arm fanatics against sovereigns, whom they declare tyrants, for having been wanting in submission to the church. Heaven is always ready to revenge any injustice done to its ministers. They are themselves submissive, and preach submission to others, only when they are permitted to share the authority, or are too feeble to resist it. This is the reason why the apostles, in the infancy of Christianity, being destitute of power, preached subordination. No sooner had this religion gained sufficient strength, than it preached resistance and rebellion; dethroning some kings and assassinating others.

In every political body, where this religion is established, there are two rival powers, which, by incessant contention, convulse and wound the state. The citizens divide into opposite parties, each of which fights, or thinks it fights, for God. These contests at different times terminate differently, but the triumphant party is always in the right. By attentive examination of such events, we shall escape the dominion of fanaticism. It is by stimulating mankind to enquiry, that they must be freed from the shackles of superstition. Let mankind think till they have thrown aside their prejudices, and they will think justly. The reign

of the priesthood will cease when men cease to be ignorant and credulous. Credulity is the offspring of ignorance, and superstition is the child of credulity.

But most kings dread that mankind should be enlightened. Accomplices with the priesthood, they have formed a league with them to stifle reason, and persecute all who confide in its guidance. Blind to their own interests, and those of their subjects, they wish only to command slaves, forgetting those slaves are always at the disposal of the priests. Thus we see science neglected, and ignorance triumphant, in those countries where this religion holds the most absolute dominion. Arts and sciences are the children of liberty, and separated from their parent they languish and die. Among Christian nations, the least superstitious are the most free, powerful, and happy. In countries where spiritual and temporal despotism are leagued, the people grovel in the most shameful ignorance and lethargic inactivity. The European nations, who boast of possessing the purest faith, are not surely the most flourishing and powerful. Their kings, enslaved themselves by priests, have not energy and courage enough to make a single struggle for their own welfare or that of their subjects. Priests, in such states, are the only order of men who are rich; other citizens languish in the deepest indigence. But of what importance are the power and happiness of nations to the sectaries of a religion who seek not for happiness in this world, who believe riches injurious, preach a God of poverty, and recommend abasement to the soul, and mortification of the flesh? It is without doubt to oblige people to practise these maxims, that the clergy, in many Christian states, have taken possession of most of the riches, and live in splendour, while their fellow-citizens are set forward in the road to heaven, unincumbered with any burthen of earthly wealth.

Such are the advantages political society derives from the Christian religion. It forms an independent state within a state. It renders the people slaves.

When sovereigns are obedient to it, it favours their tyranny. When they are disobedient, it renders their subjects fanatic and rebellious. When it accords with political power, it convulses, debases, and impoverishes nations; when not, it makes citizens unsocial, turbulent, intolerant, and mutinous.

If we examine in detail the precepts of this religion, and the maxims which flow from its principles, we shall find it interdicts every thing that can make a nation flourish. We have already seen the ideas of imperfection that it attaches to marriage, and its esteem of celibacy. These notions are highly unfavourable to population, which is, incontrovertibly, the first source of power in a state.

Commerce is not less contradictory to the spirit of a religion, the founder of which pronounced an anathema against riches, and excluded them from his kingdom. All industry is interdicted to perfect Christians; they live a provisory life on earth, and never concern themselves with the morrow.

Must it not be a great temerity and sin for a Christian to serve in war? Is not the man, who has never the right to believe himself absolutely in a state of grace, extremely rash when he exposes himself to eternal damnation? Is not the Christian, who ought to have charity for all men, and love even his enemies, guilty of an enormous crime, when he kills a man of whose dispositions he is ignorant, and whom he, perhaps, precipitates at once into hell? A Christian soldier is a monster; unless, indeed, he fights in the cause of religion. Then, if he dies, "he dies a blessed martyr."

The Christian religion has always declared war against science and all human knowledge. These have been looked upon as obstacles to salvation. Neither reason nor study are necessary to men, who are to submit their reason to the yoke of faith. From the confession of Christians themselves, the founders of their religion were simple and ignorant men. Their

disciples must be as little enlightened as they were, to admit the fables and reveries they have received from them. It has always been remarked, that the most enlightened men seldom make the best Christians. Science is apt to embarrass faith; and it moreover turns the attention from the great work of salvation, which is represented as the only necessary one. If science be serviceable to political society, ignorance is much more so to religion and its ministers. Those ages, destitute of science and industry, were the golden age of the church of Christ. Then were kings dutifully submissive to priests; then the coffers of priests held all the riches of society. The priests of a very numerous sect have kept from the eyes of their followers even the sacred pages which contain the laws of their religion. This conduct is, undoubtedly, very discreet. Reading the Bible is the surest of all means to prevent its being respected.

In one word, if the maxims of the Christian religion were rigorously and universally followed, no political society could subsist. If this assertion be doubted, listen to what was said by the earliest doctors of the church, and it will be acknowledged, that their precepts are wholly incompatible with the power and preservation of states. According to Lactantius, no Christian can become a soldier. According to St. Justin, no Christian can be a magistrate. According to St. Chrysostom, no Christian can meddle with commerce. And, according to a great number, no man ought to study. In fine, join these maxims to those of Christ, apply them in practice, and the result will be a perfect Christian, useless to his family, his country, and mankind; an idle contemplator, unconcerned in the interests of this world, and occupied entirely with the other, whither it is his most important business to go.

Let us look into Eusebius, and see if the Christian be not a real fanatic, from whom society can derive no advantage. "The manner of life," says he, "in

the Christian church, surpasses our present nature, and the ordinary life of man. There they seek neither marriages, children, nor riches. In fact, it is wholly foreign to the human manner of living. The church is given up to an immense love of heavenly things. The members, detached from earthly existence, and leaving only their bodies below, transfer their souls to heaven, where they already dwell as pure and celestial intelligences, and despise the life of other men." A man strongly persuaded of the truth of Christianity cannot, in fact, attach himself to any thing below. Every thing here is to him a cause of stumbling, and calls away his attention from the great work of his salvation. If Christians were not, fortunately, inconsistent with themselves, and wandered not incessantly from their fanatical perfections and sublime speculations, no Christian society could subsist, and the nations illuminated by the gospel would return to their pristine barbarity. We should see only wild beings, broken loose from every social tie, and wandering in solitude through this vale of tears, whose only employment would be, to groan, to weep, and pray, and render themselves and others wretched, in order to merit heaven.

In fine, a religion whose maxims tend to render mankind in general intolerant, to make kings persecutors, and their subjects slaves or rebels ; a religion, the obscure doctrines of which give birth to eternal disputes ; a religion which debases mankind, and turns them aside from their true interests ; such a religion, I say, is destructive to every society.

CHAP. XV.

OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, OR PRIESTHOOD.

THERE have been, in all ages, men who know how to profit by the errors of mankind. Priests of all religions, have laid the foundations of their greatness, power, and riches, on the fears of the vulgar. No religion has, however, had so many reasons as the Christian, for subjecting people to the priesthood. The first preachers of the gospel, the Apostles, are represented as divine men, inspired by God, and sharing his omnipotence. If each individual among their successors has not enjoyed the same privileges in the opinion of all Christians, yet the body of priests, or Church, is never abandoned by the Holy Ghost, but always illuminated thereby. They collectively, at all times, possess infallibility, and consequently their decisions become perpetual revelations, equally sacred with those of God himself.

Such being the attributes of the priesthood, this body must in virtue of the prerogatives they hold from Christ himself have a right to unconditional submission from men and nations. The enormous power they have so long exercised is not, therefore, surprising. It should be unlimited, since it is founded on the authority of the Almighty. It should be despotic, because men have no right to resist divine power. It must degenerate into abuse, for the priesthood is exercised by men whom impunity always renders licentious and corrupt.

In the infancy of Christianity, the Apostles, commissioned by Jesus Christ, preached the gospel to Jews and Gentiles. The novelty of their doctrine, as we have already seen, procured them many proselytes among the vulgar. The new Christians, inflamed with ardour for their new opinions, formed in every

city particular congregations, under the government of men appointed by the Apostles. The latter having received the faith at first hand; retained the inspection and direction of the different Christian societies they had formed. Such appears to have been the origin of Bishops or inspectors, which are perpetuated in the Church to this day;¹ an origin in which the princes of modern Christianity sufficiently pride themselves. It is known that, in this infant sect, the associates held their goods in common. This duty appears to have been rigorously exacted; for, by the command of St. Peter, two new Christians were smitten to death, for having withheld some part of their own property. The funds resulting from this practice, were at the disposal of the Apostles; to this commission the Bishops, inspectors, or priests succeeded, when they became successors of the Apostles; and as the priests must live by the altar, we may suppose that they paid themselves, and not illiberally, for their instructions, out of the public treasury. Those who attempted new spiritual conquests were, probably, obliged to content themselves with the voluntary contributions of their converts. However this may be, the treasures accumulated, through the credulous piety of the faithful, became an object of the avarice of priests, and begat discord among them. Each one wished to govern, and have the disposal of the riches of the community. Hence the cabals and factions which we find growing up with the church of God.. The priests were always first to wander from the principles of their religion. Their own ambition and avarice always contradict the disinterested maxims they teach to others.

¹ Saint Jerome highly disapproved the distinction of bishops and priests or curates. He pretends, that priests and bishops were, according to St. Paul, the same thing, before, says he, by the instigation of the Devil, there were distinctions in religion. At this day, bishops, who do nothing, enjoy great revenues; while innumerable curates, who labour, are dying with hunger.

So long as the Christian religion was much depressed and persecuted, discordant Bishops and priests combated in secret, and the noise of their quarrels did not spread far abroad. But when Constantine wished to secure to himself a party, the obscurity of which had favoured its increase, until now become very numerous, the face of every thing in the church was changed. Christian leaders, transformed to courtiers, and seduced by authority, fought openly. They engaged sovereigns in their quarrels, and persecuted their rivals. Laden by degrees with riches and honours, they would no longer be recognized as the successors of the poor and humble Apostles, sent by Christ to preach his doctrine. They became princes, and, supported by the strongest arms, opinions, they found themselves able to give laws to nations, and put the world in confusion.

Under Constantine the Pontificate had been by a shameful imprudence separated from the empire. The Emperors soon found they had cause to repent this oversight. The Bishop of Rome, that former mistress of the world, whose name still sounded awful in the ears of nations, knew how to make a skilful advantage of the troubles of the empire, invaded by barbarians, and the weakness of Emperors, too remote to watch over his conduct. By dint of plots and intrigues, the Roman pontiff at length seated himself on the throne of the Cæsars. It was for him that Emilius and Scipio had fought. He was, in fine, looked upon in the west, as the monarch of the Church, the universal Bishop, the Vicar of Jesus Christ upon earth, and the infallible organ of God. Although these haughty titles were rejected in the East, the Roman pontiff reigned, without contest, in the greater part of the Christian world. He was a God upon earth; through the imbecility of kings, he became arbiter of their destinies, and founded a theocracy or divine government, of which himself was chief, and they were his lieutenants. When they had the auda-

city to become disobedient to him, he dethroned them, or excited their subjects to rebellion. In a word, his spiritual arms were, through a long succession of ages, stronger than the temporal ones of his opponents. Nations had the stupidity to obey him, and the distribution of crowns was in his power. To secure his dominion over princes, he sowed divisions among them; and his empire would still retain its extent and vigour, if a gradual increase of knowledge had not, in spite of religious opposition, made its way among mankind, and kings, acting inconsistently with their religion, listened to ambition rather than duty. If the ministers of the church have received their power from Christ himself, to resist these his representatives is, in fact, to revolt against him. Kings, as well as subjects, cannot throw off allegiance to God without a crime. The spiritual authority proceeding from God, must, of right, have jurisdiction over temporal authority proceeding from man. A prince, who is a true Christian, must become a servant of the church, and, at best, the first slave of the clergy.

Let us not, then, be surprized, that, in the ages of ignorance, priests, being most readily obeyed by people, more attached to heavenly than earthly interests, were more powerful than kings. Among superstitious nations the pretended voice of God and his interests is more listened to than that of duty, justice, and reason. A good Christian, piously submissive to the church, must be blind and unreasonable, whenever the church commands him to be so. The power that has a right to render us absurd, has the right to render us criminal.

Besides, those that derive their power from God can be subject to no other power. Thus, the independence of the Christian clergy is founded upon the principles of their religion. Of this circumstance, they have taken care to profit, and impressed with this idea, they, after being enriched by the generosity of kings and people, have always proved ungrateful to the true sources of their own opulence and privileges. What

had been given this body, through surprize or impudence, it was found impossible to recover from their hands. They foresaw, that future generations, breaking loose from the fetters of prejudice, might tear from them the donations they had gained by the extortions of terror, and the evils of imposture. They, therefore, persuaded mankind that they held from God alone what had been given them by their fellow-mortals: and by a miracle of credulity, they were believed on their word.

Thus the interests of the clergy became separated from those of society. Men devoted to God; and chosen to be his ministers, were no longer confounded with the profane. Laws and civil tribunals renounced all power over them. They could be judged only by members of their own body. Hence the greatest excesses were often committed by them with impunity; and their persons, at the disposal of God alone, were sacred and inviolable. Their possessions, although they contributed nothing to public charges, or, at least, no more than they pleased; were defended and enlarged by fanatic sovereigns, who hoped thereby to conciliate the favour of Heaven. In fact, those reverend wolves in shepherds' clothing, under pretence of feeding with instruction, devoured with avarice, and, secure in their disguise, fattened on the blood of their flocks, unpunished and unsuspected. From their instructions for eighteen hundred years past, what advantages have nations derived? Have these infallible men found it possible to agree among themselves, on the most essential points of a religion, revealed by God himself? Strange, indeed, is that revelation, which needs continual commentaries, and interpretations. What must be thought of these divine writings, which every sect understands so differently? Those who are incessantly fed with the gospel, do not understand these matters better, nor are they more virtuous than others. They are commanded to obey the Church, and the Church is never at accord with

city particular congregations, under the government of men appointed by the Apostles. The latter having received the faith at first hand; retained the inspection and direction of the different Christian societies they had formed. Such appears to have been the origin of Bishops or inspectors, which are perpetuated in the Church to this day;¹ an origin in which the princes of modern Christianity sufficiently pride themselves. It is known that, in this infant sect, the associates held their goods in common. This duty appears to have been rigorously exacted; for, by the command of St. Peter, two new Christians were smitten to death, for having withheld some part of their own property. The funds resulting from this practice, were at the disposal of the Apostles; to this commission the Bishops, inspectors, or priests succeeded, when they became successors of the Apostles; and as the priests must live by the altar, we may suppose that they paid themselves, and not illiberally, for their instructions, out of the public treasury. Those who attempted new spiritual conquests were, probably, obliged to content themselves with the voluntary contributions of their converts. However this may be, the treasures accumulated, through the credulous piety of the faithful, became an object of the avarice of priests, and begat discord among them. Each one wished to govern, and have the disposal of the riches of the community. Hence the cabals and factions which we find growing up with the church of God. The priests were always first to wander from the principles of their religion. Their own ambition and avarice always contradict the disinterested maxims they teach to others.

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So long as the Christian religion was much depressed and persecuted, discordant Bishops and priests combated in secret, and the noise of their quarrels did not spread far abroad. But when Constantine wished to secure to himself a party, the obscurity of which had favoured its increase, until now become very numerous, the face of every thing in the church was changed. Christian leaders, transformed to courtiers, and seduced by authority, fought openly. They engaged sovereigns in their quarrels, and persecuted their rivals. Laden by degrees with riches and honours, they would no longer be recognized as the successors of the poor and humble Apostles, sent by Christ to preach his doctrine. They became princes, and, supported by the strongest arms, opinions; they found themselves able to give laws to nations, and put the world in confusion.

Under Constantine the Pontificate had been by a shameful imprudence separated from the empire. The Emperors soon found they had cause to repent this oversight. The Bishop of Rome, that former mistress of the world, whose name still sounded awful in the ears of nations, knew how to make a skilful advantage of the troubles of the empire, invaded by barbarians, and the weakness of Emperors, too remote to watch over his conduct. By dint of plots and intrigues, the Roman pontiff at length seated himself on the throne of the Cæsars. It was for him that Emilius and Scipio had fought. He was, in fine, looked upon in the west, as the monarch of the Church, the universal Bishop, the Vicar of Jesus Christ upon earth, and the infallible organ of God. Although these haughty titles were rejected in the East, the Roman pontiff reigned, without contest, in the greater part of the Christian world. He was a God upon earth; through the imbecility of kings, he became arbiter of their destinies, and founded a theocracy or divine government, of which himself was chief, and they were his lieutenants. When they had the auda-

city particular congregations, under the government of men appointed by the Apostles. The latter having received the faith at first hand, retained the inspection and direction of the different Christian societies they had formed. Such appears to have been the origin of Bishops or inspectors, which are perpetuated in the Church to this day ;¹ an origin in which the princes of modern Christianity sufficiently pride themselves. It is known that, in this infant sect, the associates held their goods in common. This duty appears to have been rigorously exacted ; for, by the command of St. Peter, two new Christians were smitten to death, for having withheld some part of their own property. The funds resulting from this practice, were at the disposal of the Apostles ; to this commission the Bishops, inspectors, or priests succeeded, when they became successors of the Apostles ; and as the priests must live by the altar, we may suppose that they paid themselves, and not illiberally, for their instructions, out of the public treasury. Those who attempted new spiritual conquests were, probably, obliged to content themselves with the voluntary contributions of their converts. However this may be, the treasures accumulated, through the credulous piety of the faithful, became an object of the avarice of priests, and begat discord among them. Each one wished to govern, and have the disposal of the riches of the community. Hence the cabals and factions which we find growing up with the church of God. The priests were always first to wander from the principles of their religion. Their own ambition and avarice always contradict the disinterested maxims they teach to others.

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fatal opinions. The spirit of intolerance and persecution will ever be the essence of every sect founded on the Bible. A mild and humane religion can never belong to a partial and cruel God, whom the opinions of men can fill with wrath. Wherever Christian sects exist, priests will exercise a power which may prove fatal to the state, and bodies of fanatical enthusiasts will be formed, always ready to rush to slaughter, when their spiritual guides cry, the church or the cause of God is in danger.

Thus, in Christian countries, we see the temporal power servilely submissive to the clergy, executing their commands, exterminating their enemies, and supporting their rights, riches, and immunities. In almost all nations where the church prevails, the most idle, useless, seditious, and dangerous men are most liberally honoured and rewarded. Superstition thinks she can never do enough for the ministers of her gods. These sentiments are the same in all sects.¹ Priests every where endeavour to instil them into kings, and to make policy bend to religion, in doing which they often oppose the best institutions. They in all places aim at the superintendence of education, and they fill their adherents with their fatal prejudices from their infancy.

It is, however, in places that remained subject to the Roman pontiff, that the clergy have wallowed in the greatest profusion of riches and power. Credulity has even enlisted kings among their subjects, and debased them into mere executioners of their will. They were in readiness to unsheath the sword whenever the priest commanded it. The monarchs of the Roman sect, blinder than all others, had an unbounded confidence in the clergy of their church that generally rendered them mere tools of that body. This sect, by means of furious intolerance and atrocious persecutions, became more numerous than any other one; and their turbulent and cruel temper has justly rendered them

¹ Except the Quakers.

odious to the most reasonable, that is to say, least Christian nations.

The Romish system was, in fact, invented to throw all the power into the hands of the clergy. Its priests have had the address to identify themselves with God. Their cause was always his ; their glory became the glory of God. Their decisions were divine oracles ; their possessions appertained to the kingdom of heaven. Their pride, avarice, and cruelty, were rendered lawful, because they were never actuated by other motives than the interest of their heavenly master. In this sect, the priest saw his king at his feet, humbly confessing his sins, and beseeching the holy man that he might be reconciled to his God. Seldom was the priest known to render his sacred ministry subservient to the good of mankind. He thought not of reproaching monarchs with the abuse of their power, the misery of their subjects, and the tears of the oppressed. Too timid, or too much of a courtier to thunder truth in their ears, he mentioned not to them the insupportable oppressions, the galling tyranny, and useless wars under which their subjects groaned. But such objects never interest the church, which might indeed be of some utility, if its influence were exercised in bridling the excesses of superstitious tyrants. The terrors of the other world would not be unpardonable falsehoods, could they make the herd of wicked kings to tremble. This, however, has not been the object of the ministers of religion. They never stickled for the interest of mankind. They always burned incense at the altar of tyranny, looked upon its crimes with indulgence, and devised for them easy means of expiation. Tyrants were sure of the pardon and favour of heaven, if they entered warmly into the quarrels of the clergy. Thus, among the Catholics, priests governed kings, and consequently all their subjects. Superstition and despotism formed an internal alliance, and united their efforts, to plunge mankind into slavery and wretchedness. Priests frightened nations with religious terror,

that they might be preyed upon by their sovereigns at leisure; and, in return, those sovereigns loaded the priests with opulence and power, and undertook, from time to time, to exterminate their enemies.

What shall we say of those subtle geniuses which Christians call casuists, those pretended moralists who have computed the number of sins against God which a man can commit without risking his salvation? These men of profound wisdom have enriched Christian morality with a ridiculous *tarif* of sins; they know precisely the degree of wrath which each excites in the breast of the Almighty. True morality has but one criterion for judging the sins of man; the greatest are those that injure society most. The conduct which injures ourselves is imprudent and unreasonable. That which injures others is unjust and criminal.

Every thing, even to idleness itself, is rewarded in Christian priests. Multitudes of these drones are maintained in ease and affluence, while, instead of serving society, they only prey upon it. They are paid with profusion for useless prayers which they make with negligence. And while monks and lazy priests, those blood-suckers of society, wallow in an abundance shameful to the states by whom they are tolerated, the man of talents, the man of science, and the brave soldier are suffered to languish in indigence, and poorly exist on the mere necessities of life.

In a word, Christianity makes nations accomplices in all the evils which are heaped upon them by the Clergy. Neither the uselessness of their prayers demonstrated by the experience of so many ages, the bloody effects of their fatal controversies, nor even their licentious excesses, have yet been sufficient to convince mankind how shamefully they are duped by that infallible Church, to the existence of which, they have had the simplicity to believe, their salvation attached.

CHAP. XVI.

CONCLUSION.

ALL which has hitherto been said, demonstrates, in the clearest manner, that the Christian religion is contrary to true policy, and the welfare of mankind. It can be advantageous only to ignorant and vicious princes, who are desirous to reign over slaves, and who, in order to strip and tyrannize over them with impunity, form a league with the priesthood, whose function it has ever been to deceive in the name of heaven. But such imprudent princes should remember, that, in order to succeed in their projects, they must themselves become the slaves of the priesthood, who (should the former fail in due submission, or refuse to be subservient to their passions) will infallibly turn their sacred arms against their royal heads.

We have seen, above, that the Christian religion is not, on account of its fanatic virtues, blind zeal, and pretended perfections, the less injurious to sound morality, right reason, the happiness of individuals, and domestic harmony. It is easy to perceive that a Christian, who proposes to himself as a model, a gloomy and suffering God, must take pains to afflict and render himself wretched. If this world be only a passage, if this life be only a pilgrimage, it must be ridiculous for a man to attach himself to any thing here below. If his God be offended with either the actions or opinions of his fellow-creatures, he must do every thing in his power to punish them with severity, or be wanting in zeal and affection to his God. A good Christian must fly the world, or become a torment to himself and others.

These reflections are sufficient to answer those who pretend that the Christian religion is the foundation of true policy and morality, and that where it is not pro-

fessed, there can be neither good men nor good citizens. The converse of this proposition is undoubtedly much truer; for we may assert, that a perfect Christian, who conforms to all the principles of his religion, who faithfully imitates the divine men proposed to him as a model, and practises their austerities in solitude, or carries their fanatic enthusiasm and bigotry into society, must be either useless to mankind, or a troublesome and dangerous citizen.¹

Were we to believe the advocates of the Christian religion, it would appear, that no morality can exist where this religion is not established. Yet we may perceive, at a single glance, that there are virtues in every corner of the earth. No political society could exist without them. Among the Chinese, the Indians, and the Mahometans, there are, undoubtedly, good citizens, tender fathers, affectionate husbands, and dutiful children. And good people there, as well as with us, would be more numerous, if they were governed by a wise policy, which, instead of causing children to be taught a senseless religion, should give them equitable laws, teach them a pure morality uncontaminated with fanaticism, deter them from vice by suitable punishments, and invite them to the practice of virtue by proper rewards.

In truth, it seems (I repeat it) that religion has been invented to relieve governments from the care of being just, and reigning over equitable laws. Religion is the art of inspiring mankind with an enthusiasm, which is designed to divert their attention from the

¹ The clergy incessantly cry out against unbelievers and philosophers, whom they style dangerous subjects. Yet, if we open history, we do not find that philosophers are those who have embroiled states and empires; but that such events have generally been produced by the religious. The Dominican, who poisoned the emperor Henry XI. James Clement, and Ravallac, were not unbelievers. They were not philosophers, but fanatic Christians, who led Charles I. to the scaffold. It was the minister Gomare, and not Spinosa, who set Holland on fire, &c.

evils with which they are overwhelmed by those who govern them. By means of the invisible powers with which they are threatened, they are forced to suffer in silence the miseries with which they are afflicted by visible ones. They are taught to hope that, if they consent to become miserable in this world, they will for that reason be happy in the next.

Thus religion has become the most powerful support of a shameful and iniquitous policy, which holds it necessary to deceive mankind, that they may the more easily be governed. Far from enlightened and virtuous governments be resources so base ! Let them learn their true interests, and know that these cannot be separated from that of the people. Let them know that no state can be truly potent, except the citizens who compose it be courageous, active, industrious, virtuous, and attached to their government. Let governments know, that the attachment of their constituents can have no other foundation than the happiness which the former procures the latter. If governments were penetrated with these important truths, they would need the aid of neither religion nor priests. Let them be just and equitable—let them be careful to reward talents and virtue, to discourage inutility and punish vice, and their states will soon be filled with worthy and sensible citizens, who will feel it their own interest to serve and defend their country, and support the government which is the instrument of their felicity. They will do their duties, without the influence of revelation, or mysteries of paradise or hell.

Morality will be preached in vain, if it is not supported by the example of influential characters. It belongs to magistrates to teach morality, by practising it, by inciting to virtue, and repressing vice in every form. Their power is weakened the moment they suffer a power to arise in the state, whose influence is exerted to render morality subservient to superstition and fanaticism. In states where education is entrusted

to a fanatic, enthusiastic clergy, we find citizens overwhelmed with superstition, and destitute of every virtue, except a blind faith, a ferocious zeal, a ridiculous submission to puerile ceremonies, and, in one word, fantastic notions, which never render them better men. Notwithstanding the happy influences attributed to the Christian religion, do we find more virtues in those who profess it, than in those who are strangers to it? Are the men, redeemed by the blood of even a Deity, more honest than others? Among Christians, impressed with their religion, one would imagine we should search in vain for rapine, fornication, adultery, and oppression. Among the orthodox courtiers, who surround Christian thrones, do we see intrigues, calumny, or perfidy? Among the clergy, who announce to others such redoubtable dogmas, and such terrible chastisements, do we find crimes that shun the day, and every species of iniquity? All these men are Christians, who, unbridled by their religion, continually violate the plainest duties of morality, and knowingly offend a God, whom they are conscious of having irritated. Yet they flatter themselves that they shall be able, by a tardy repentance at death, to appease that divine justice which they have insulted during the whole course of their lives.

In the mean time, we shall not deny, that the Christian religion sometimes proves a restraint to timorous minds, which are incapable of that fanaticism, and destitute of that destructive energy, which lead to the commission of great crimes. But such minds would have been honest and harmless without this restraint. The fear of rendering themselves odious to mankind, of incurring contempt, and losing their reputation, would have been a chain of equal strength on the actions of such men. Those who are so blind as to tread these considerations under foot, would never be deterred from it by the menaces of religion.

Every man, who has received a proper education, experiences within himself a painful sentiment of

mingled shame and fear, whenever he soils himself with the guilt of a dishonest action. He even condemns himself frequently, with greater severity than others do. He dreads, and shuns the eyes of his fellow-creatures; he even wishes to fly from himself. This is what constitutes remorse.

In a word, Christianity puts no restraint upon the passions of mankind, which might not be more efficaciously applied to them by reason, education, and sound morality. If the wicked were sure of being punished, as often as they think of committing dishonest actions, they would be forced to desist. In a society well constituted, contempt will always follow vice, and crimes will produce punishment. Education, guided only by the good of society, ought ever to teach mankind to esteem themselves, to dread the contempt of others, and fear infamy more than death itself. But this kind of morality can never be consistent with a religion which commands men to despise themselves, avoid the esteem of others, and attempt to please only a God, whose conduct is inexplicable.

In fine, if the Christian religion be, as is pretended, a restraint to the crimes of men, if it produces salutary effects on some individuals; can these advantages, so rare, so weak and doubtful, be compared with the evident and immense evils which this religion has produced on the earth? Can some few trifling crimes prevented, some conversions useless to society, some steril and tardy repentances, enter into the balance against the continual dissensions, bloody wars, horrid massacres, persecutions, and cruelties, of which the Christian religion has been a continual cause and pretext? For one secret sinful thought suppressed by it, there are even whole nations armed for reciprocal destruction; the hearts of millions of fanatics are inflamed; families and states are plunged into confusion; and the earth is bedewed with tears and

blood.¹ After this, let common sense decide the magnitude of the advantages which mankind derive from the glad tidings which Christians pretend to have received from their God.

Many honest people, although not ignorant of the ills produced among mankind by this religion, nevertheless consider it a necessary evil, and think it dangerous to attempt to uproot it. Mankind, say they, are naturally superstitious; they must be amused with chimeras, and become outrageous when deprived of them. But, I answer, mankind are superstitious only because, in infancy, every thing contributes to render them so. He is led to expect his happiness from chimeras, because he is forbidden to seek for it from realities.

In fine, it is for philosophers and for magistrates to conduct mankind back to reason. The former will obtain the confidence and love of the latter, when they endeavour to promote the public good. Undeceived themselves, they may undeceive others by degrees. Governments will prevent superstition from doing harm, when they despise it and stand aloof from its ridiculous disputes. When they tolerate all sects, and side with none, those sects, after quarrelling awhile, will drop their masks, and become contemptible even to themselves. Superstition falls beneath its own weight when, freedom of conscience being restored to mankind, reason is at liberty to attack their follies. True toleration and freedom of thought are the most proper instruments for the destruction of religious fanaticism. Imposture is in nature timid, and when she finds herself confronted with truth, her arms fall from her hands.

If a criminal and undiscerning policy has, hitherto, in almost all parts of the earth, had recourse to the aid of religion, to enslave mankind and render them

¹ Witness, even in this enlightened age, the Holy Crusade against France, for the purpose of restoring the Christian religion.

miserable, let a virtuous and more enlightened policy hereafter destroy it by little and little to render them happy. If education has hitherto formed enthusiasts and fanatics, let it be hereafter calculated to form good citizens. If a morality founded on miracles, and looking to futurity, has been unable to restrain the passions of mankind, let a morality established upon their present and real wants demonstrate that, in a well constituted society, happiness is always the reward of virtue: shame, contempt, and punishment the companions of vice, and the wages of sin.

If error be an evil, to it let truth be opposed. If enthusiasm produce disorders in society, let it be suppressed. Let us leave to Asia a religion begotten by the ardent imaginations of the orientals. Let our milder climates be more reasonable, more free, and more happy. Let us make them the residence of honesty, activity, industry, social affections, and exalted minds. May not reason be permitted to hope, that she shall one day re-assume the power so long usurped from her by error, illusion, and deceit? When will nations renounce chimerical hopes, to contemplate their true interests? Will they never shake off the yokes of those hypocritical tyrants, who are interested only in the errors of mankind? Let us hope it. Truth must at last triumph over falsehood.—Mankind, fatigued with their own credulity, will return to her arms.—Reason will break their chains—Reason, which was created to reign, with undivided empire, over all intelligent beings.

AMEN.

ERRATUM.—Page 58, thirteen lines from the bottom, for
punishing, lege furnishing.



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THE
IMPORTANT EXAMINATION
OF
The Holy Scriptures.

ATTRIBUTED TO
LORD BOLINGBROKE,
BUT
WRITTEN BY M. VOLTAIRE,

AND FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1736.

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PREFACE.

THE ambition of domineering over the mind, is one of the strongest passions. A theologian, a missionary, or a partisan of any description, is always for conquering like a prince, and there are many more sects than there are sovereigns in the world. To whose guidance shall I submit my mind? Must I be a Christian, because I happened to be born in London, or in Madrid? Must I be a Mussulman, because I was born in Turkey? As it is myself alone that I ought to consult, the choice of a religion is my greatest interest. One man adores God by Mahomet, another by the Grand Lama, and another by the Pope. Weak and foolish men ! adore God by your own reason.

The stupid indolence which takes possession of the generality of men, and sets aside this most important of all concerns, seems to intimate to us that they are nothing but stupid machines, endowed with animal functions, whose instinct never occupies itself beyond the present moment. We make use of our understandings in the same way as we use our bodies ; both are frequently abandoned to quacks, whose chief concern is to get possession of our money.

The prodigious multitude of Christian sects already forms a great presumption that they are all founded on erroneous systems. The wise man says to himself—“ If God had intended us to render him any particular worship, this worship would have been necessary to our species. If this worship were necessary, he him-

self would have communicated it to each of us, as invariably as he has given us two eyes and one mouth." This worship would likewise have been uniform, since we have not been able to discover any thing necessary to the human race, that does not possess this uniformity. The universal principles of reason are common to all civilized nations ; all acknowledge a Deity ; and they may thence infer, ~~that this~~ belief is founded in truth. But each nation has a different religion ; they ought, therefore, to conclude, that reason tells them to adore a God ; but that they have uniformly fallen into errors by wishing to overstep the bounds prescribed them.

The principle, then, in which the whole universe is in agreement, appears to be true ; other principles whose consequences are diametrically opposite must appear to be false, and it is natural for us to mistrust them. We have a still greater diffidence when we find that the sole aim of those at the head of each sect is to domineer and enrich themselves as much as they can ; and that from the Dairis of Japan to the Bishop of Rome, they are occupied in raising to the Pontiff a throne founded on the misery of the people, and often cemented with their blood.

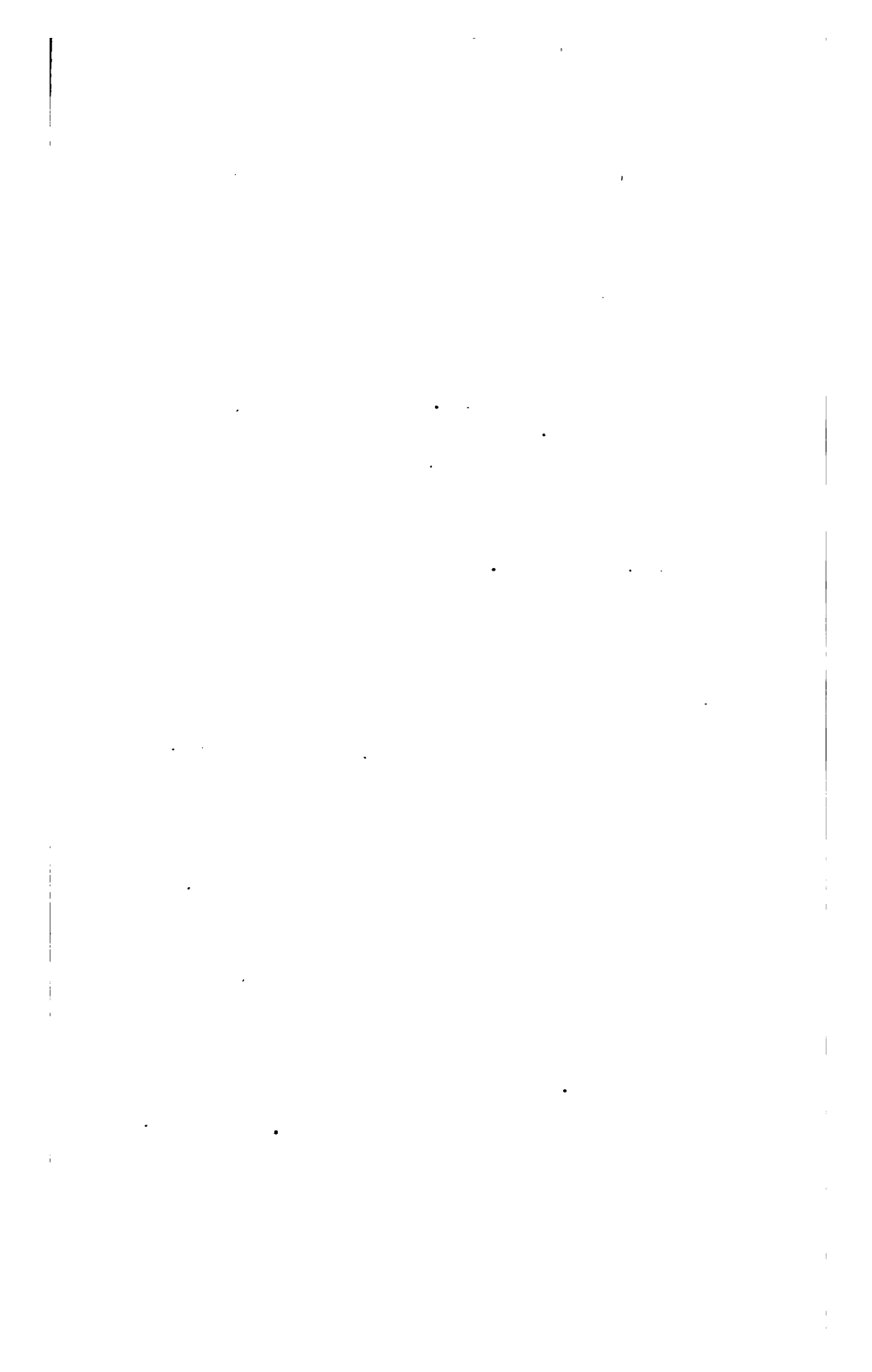
Let the Japanese, then, examine how long the Dairis have held them in subjection ; let the Tartars make use of their reason in order to judge whether the Grand Lama be immortal ; give the Turks permission to judge their Alcoran, and let us, as Christians, examine our Gospels.

I have learnt that a French Vicar, of the name of John Meslier, who died a short time since, prayed on his death-bed that God would forgive him for having taught Christianity. I have seen a Vicar in Dorsetshire relinquish a living of £200 a year, and confess to his parishioners, that his conscience would not permit him to preach the shocking absurdities of the Christians. But neither the will or testament of John

PREFACE.

Meslier, nor the declaration of this worthy Vicar, are what I consider decisive proofs. Uriel Acosta, a Jew, publicly renounced the Old Testament in Amsterdam ; however, I pay no more attention to the Jew Acosta than to Parson Meslier. I will read the arguments on both sides of the trial, with careful attention, not suffering the lawyers to tamper with me ; but will weigh, before God, the reasons of both parties, and decide according to my conscience. I commence by being my own instructor.

NOTE BY THE EDITOR.—Some passages have been omitted in the translation of this work, not because they were too strong for insertion, but because they were not to the point in the general style of the writings in the DEIST.



THE
IMPORTANT EXAMINATION :

&c.

CHAP. I.

OF THE BOOKS OF MOSES.

CHRISTIANITY is founded on Judaism ; let us, then, examine if Judaism be the work of God. The books of Moses are handed to me, and the first point I have to ascertain is, whether or not these books were actually written by Moses.

In the first place. Is it possible that Moses could have engraven the Pentateuch, or the books of the law, on stone, and that he found engravers and stone-cutters in a frightful wilderness, where, it is said, that his people had neither tailors, shoemakers, raiment, nor bread, and where God was compelled to work a continued miracle, for the space of forty years, in order to clothe and feed them ?

Secondly. The book of Joshua tells us that Deuteronomy was written on an altar of rough stone,¹ covered over with plaster. How could a whole book be written on plaster ? Would not the letters soon be effaced by the blood which continually flowed on this altar ? And how could this altar, this monument of Deuteronomy, subsist so long, in a country where the Jews had been such a length of time reduced to a

¹ Joshua viii. 31, 32.

state of slavery, which their plunders had so fully justified ?

Thirdly. The innumerable geographical and chronological errors and contradictions which we find in the Pentateuch, have compelled many, both Jews and Christians, to declare, that the Pentateuch could not have been written by Moses. The learned Le Clerc, a number of divines, even our great Newton, have embraced this opinion, which appears, at least, very probable.

I likewise ask any reasonable man, if it be at all likely that Moses, when he was in the wilderness, would have given precepts for Jewish kings, who did not exist for several centuries after him ; and if it be possible that, when in the same wilderness, he could have allotted forty-eight cities and their suburbs to the tribe of the Levites alone, independent of the tenths which the other tribes ought to pay them ? It is, doubtless, very natural to suppose that the priests would lay hold of every thing, but we cannot imagine that they had forty-eight cities given them, in a little canton where at that time two villages scarcely existed : as many cities would, at least, have been necessary for each of the other Jewish tribes, and the whole would have amounted to four hundred and eighty cities with their suburbs. The Jews have not written their history in any other manner. Each trait is a ridiculous hyperbole, a stupid falsehood, or an absurd fable.

CHAP. II.

OF THE PERSON OF MOSES.

WAS there ever such a person as Moses ? There is so much of prodigy in him from his cradle to his death, that he appears to be an imaginary personage

like our magician Merlin. If he had really existed, if he had performed the dreadful miracles attributed to him in Egypt, would it have been possible that no Egyptian author should have spoken of these miracles, and that the Greeks, the lovers of the marvellous, had not recorded a single word respecting him? Flavius Josephus, who, to extol his despicable nation, seeks after the testimony of the Egyptian authors who have spoken of the Jews, has not the face to quote one that makes mention of the prodigies of Moses. Is not this universal silence a proof that Moses is only a fabulous personage?

Those who have paid any attention to antiquity, know that the ancient Arabs invented many fables, which succeeding ages made known to other nations. They had imagined the history of ancient Bacchus, whom they suppose to have lived long anterior to the time when the Jews tell us their Moses made his appearance. This Bacchus, or Back, who was born in Arabia, had written his laws on two tables of stone; he was called Misem; a name which has some resemblance to that of Moses; he was picked up in a box on the waters, and the signification of his name is, "saved from the waters;" he had a rod with which he performed miracles, and he could change his rod into a serpent at his own pleasure. This same Misem passed the Red Sea dry shod at the head of his army; he divided the waters of Orontes and Hydaspus, and suspended them to the right and left, and a fiery column lighted his army during the night. The ancient Orphic verses which were sung in the orgies of Bacchus, celebrated a part of these extravagancies. This fable was so ancient, that the fathers of the church believed Misem or Bacchus to have been Noah.¹

¹ We must observe that Bacchus was known in Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, and Greece, a long while before any nation had heard the name of Moses, or even of Noah and the whole of his genealogy. Every thing that belonged exclusively to the Jewish writ-

Is it not highly probable that the Jews adopted this fable, and that it was written as soon as they had obtained some knowledge of literature under their kings? They must have a little of the marvellous as well as other people, but they were not the inventors; never was there a petty nation more stupid; all their falsehoods were plagiarisms; and all their ceremonies were visibly performed in imitation of those of the Phœnicians, Assyrians, and Egyptians.

What they themselves have added appear to be such disgusting stupidities and absurdities, that they excite both our indignation and pity. In what ridiculous romance could we bear to hear of a man changing all the waters into blood by a flourish of his rod, in the name of a God unknown, while the magicians can do the same thing in the name of their local deities? The only superiority that Moses obtains over the king's magicians is, in creating lice, which they were unable to perform. This made a great prince say, that as far as lice were concerned, the Jews could do more than all the magicians in the world.

How did an angel of the Lord come and kill all the cattle in Egypt? How did it happen that the king of Egypt had afterwards an army of cavalry? And how did the cavalry proceed to cross the muddy bottom of the Red Sea? How did the same angel of the Lord slay all the first-born of the Egyptians in a single night? It was then that the pretended Moses ought to have taken possession of this beautiful country, instead

ings, was absolutely unknown to both Eastern and Western nations, from the name of Adam to that of David.

The wretched Jews had their own chronology and fables apart, which bore only a slight resemblance to those of other nations. Their writers, who were very tardy in commencing their labours, ransacked every thing they could find among their neighbours, and disguised their thefts very badly; witness the fable of Moses, borrowed from that of Bacchus, their ridiculous Sampson from that of Hercules, Jephtha's daughter from Iphigenia, Lot's wife imitated from Eurydice, &c.

of running away like a coward and a vagabond, with two or three millions of men, among whom it is said that there were six hundred and thirty thousand combatants. It was this prodigious multitude that he took with him to wander and die in the wilderness, where they could not even find water to drink. To facilitate this grand expedition, his God divides the waters of the sea, which he raises like two mountains to the right and left, in order that his favourite people may perish with hunger and thirst.

All the rest of the history of Moses is equally absurd and barbarous. His quails; his manna; his conversations with God; twenty-three thousand of the people killed by order of the priest; twenty-four thousand massacred at another time; and six hundred and thirty thousand combatants in a wilderness where they could never find two thousand men! Assuredly the whole of this appears to be the height of extravagance; and it has been said, that Orlando Furioso and Don Quixote are geometrical books in comparison with those of the Hebrews. If we could find only a few rational and honest actions in the fable of Moses, we might then in reality believe that such a person had existed.

They have the face to tell us, that the feast of the Passover among the Jews, is a proof of the passage of the Red Sea. At this feast they thanked the Jewish God for his goodness in killing all the first-born of Egypt; and they tell us, that nothing could be more true than this holy and divine butchery.

"Can we conceive," says that declaimer and trifling reasoner, Abbadie, "that it was possible for Moses to institute sensible memorials of an event, recognized to be false by more than six hundred thousand witnesses?" Poor man, thou shouldst have said by more than two millions of witnesses, for six hundred and thirty thousand combatants, whether they were fugitives or not, assuredly lead us to suppose that there were more than two millions of inhabitants. Thou sayest, then, that

Moses read his Pentateuch to two or three millions of Jews. Thou believest, likewise, that these two or three millions would have written against Moses if they had discovered any errors in his Pentateuch, and that they would have had their remarks inserted in the journals of the country. Thou hast forgot nothing, except telling us that these three millions have signed as witnesses, and that thou hast seen their signature.

Thou believest, then, that the temples and rites instituted in honour of Bacchus, Hercules, and Persius, evidently prove that Persius, Hercules, and Bacchus, were the sons of Jupiter; and that among the Romans; the temple of Castor and Pollux was a demonstration that Castor and Pollux had fought for the Romans. Thus they always beg the question; and in matters of the greatest importance to the human race, these controversial traffickers make use of arguments that Lady Blackacre durst not hazard on the stage.

We see that these tales have been written by fools, commented upon by simpletons, taught by knaves, and given to children to be learned by heart; yet the sage is called a blasphemer because he becomes indignant, and is irritated at the most abominable fooleries that ever disgraced human nature.

CHAP. III.

OF THE INSPIRATION ATTRIBUTED TO THE JEWISH BOOKS.

How can we suppose that God would choose a horde of Arabs to be his favourite people, and that he would arm this horde against all other nations? And why, when fighting at the head of them, did he so frequently suffer his people to be vanquished and to become slaves?

In giving them laws, why did he forget to inculcate

among this little troop of thieves, the belief of the immortality of the soul, and the rewards and punishments after death,¹ while all the great neighbouring nations, such as the Chaldeans, Egyptians, Assyrians, and Phœnicians, had so long embraced this salutary belief?

Is it possible that, God should explain to the Jews the manner of going to the privy in the wilderness,² and hide from them the dogma of a future life.

Herodotus tells us, that the famous temple of Tyre, was built two thousand three hundred years before his time; and they say, that Moses conducted his troop in the desert, about sixteen hundred years before our æra. Herodotus wrote five hundred years before the vulgar æra, so that the temple of the Phœnicians subsisted twelve hundred years before Moses, and the Phœnician religion was established long before that time.

¹ This is the strongest argument against the Jewish law, and which the great Bolingbroke did not sufficiently insist upon. What! The legislators of the Indians, Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks, and Romans, all taught the immortality of the soul, which we find in twenty places even in Homer, and yet the pretended Moses does not speak of it? Not a single word is said of it either in the Jewish Decalogue or in the Pentateuch.

It became necessary for commentators, who were either very ignorant, or more inclined to knavery than folly, to twist some passages of Job, who was not a Jew, in order to make it believed by men more ignorant than themselves, that Job had spoken of a future life, because he said, "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."—Job xix. 25. What connection is there, I pray you, between a sick man, who is suffering in hopes of being cured, and the immortality of the soul, hell, and paradise?

If Warburton had contented himself with proving that the Jewish law did not mention a future life, he would have rendered a very great service. But by the most incomprehensible madness, he wished to have it believed that the stupidity of the Pentateuch was a proof of its divinity, and his excessive pride supported this chimera with the most intolerant insolence.

² Swift said, that according to the Pentateuch, God had taken more care of the Jews' hinder parts than he did of their souls.

This religion, as well as that of the Chaldeans and Egyptians, announced the immortality of the soul, which was never a fundamental dogma with the Jews. We are told that they were a rude people, and that God put himself upon a level with them. With whom? Jewish robbers! God more stupid than his people! Is not this blasphemy?

CHAP. IV.

WHO IS THE AUTHOR OF THE PENTATEUCH?

I AM asked, who is the author of the Pentateuch? I would as soon be asked who wrote the Four Sons of Aimon, Robert the Devil, and the history of Merlin the magician.

Sir Isaac Newton, who so far degraded himself as to examine this question seriously, pretends that Samuel wrote these reveries, apparently to render the name of king odious to the Jewish horde, whom this detestable priest wished to govern by himself. I am of opinion myself, that the Jews could neither read nor write, till the time of their captivity under the Chaldeans, because their letters were first Chaldaic, and afterwards Syriac. We have never had an alphabet purely Hebraic.

I fancy that Esdras forged all these tales of a tub after the captivity. He wrote them in Chaldean characters in the jargon of the country, in the same way as the peasantry of the North of Ireland make use of the English alphabet.

The Cuteans who inhabited Samaria wrote the same Pentateuch in Phœnician characters, which they made use of in that country, and this Pentateuch is still extant.

I believe Jeremiah might contribute a good deal to

the composition of this romance. We know that he had a strong attachment to the Babylonish kings; it is evident from his rhapsodies that he was paid by the Babylonians, and that he betrayed his own country; he wishes every thing to yield to the king of Babylon. The Egyptians were at that time enemies of the Babylonians, and it was to make his court to the great king who was master of Hershalaïm Kedusha, called by us Jerusalem, which made Jeremiah and Esdras conspire to instil into the Jews such an horror for the Egyptians. They took care to say nothing about the people of the Euphrates. They are slaves that keep upon good terms with their masters. They confess, indeed, that the Jewish horde has almost always been enslaved, but they respect those to whom they were then in subjection.

Whether or not any other Jews have written the feats and tricks of their kings, is a matter as unimportant to me, as the History of the Knights of the Round Table; and the Twelve Peers of Charlemagne; and I fancy the most useless of all researches must be that of finding out the name of the author of a ridiculous book.

Who first wrote the histories of Jupiter, Neptune, and Pluto? I do not know, nor do I care about knowing it.

CHAP. V.

THAT THE JEWS HAVE BORROWED ALL FROM OTHER NATIONS.

It has frequently been said, that petty enslaved states always endeavour to imitate their masters; that a weak and uncivilized people rudely conform to the customs of great nations. Cornwall apes London, London does not ape Cornwall. Can any thing be more natural than the supposition, that the Jews have

borrowed what they could of the religious worship, laws, and customs of their neighbours ?

It is now quite certain, that their God whom we call Jehovah, pronounced by them *Yaho*, was the ineffable name of the God of the Phœnicians and Egyptians, and was known to be so by the ancients.

Clemens Alexandrinus, in the first book of his *Stromates*, relates, that those who entered the Egyptian temples, were compelled to carry a species of talisman about them, which was composed of this word *Yaho* ; and when they had acquired a certain method of pronouncing this word, he who heard it fell down dead, or at least into a swoon. This is what the jugglers of the temple endeavoured to persuade the superstitious.

It is well known that the form of the serpent, the cherubims, the ceremony of the red cow, ablutions, since called baptism, linen robes reserved for the priests, fastings, abstinence from pork and other meats, and circumcision, were all imitations of the Egyptians.

The Jews confess that they were a long time without a temple, and that they had none for more than five hundred years after Moses, according to their own chronology, which is always erroneous. At length they invaded a small city, in which they built a temple in imitation of great nations. What had they before ? A box. This was customary among the Nomades, and the Canaanites of the interior, who were very poor. There was an ancient tradition among the Jews, that when they were Nomades, that is to say, wanderers in the deserts of Arabia Petrea, they carried a box containing a rude image of a god named Remphan, or a species of star, cut out in wood. You will find traces of this worship in some of the prophets, and particularly in the pretended discourse which the "Acts of the Apostles" puts into the mouth of Stephen.¹

Even according to the accounts of the Jews them-

¹ Acts vii. 43.

selves, the Phœnicians, (whom they call Philistines) had the temple of Dagon, before the Jewish troop had a house. If this were the case, if all their worship in the wilderness consisted in having a box to the honour of the god Remphan, who was nothing more than a star revered by the Arabs, it is clear, that the Jews in their origin were only a band of wandering Arabs, whose pillaging enabled them to establish themselves in Palestine, who afterwards formed a religion to their own taste, and who composed a history containing nothing but fables. They took a part of the fable of the ancient Bacchus, and gave their hero the name of Moses; but that we should revere these fables, that we should have made them the basis of our religion, and that these fables should still be credited in a philosophical age, is what raises the indignation of all wise men. The Christian church sings Jewish prayers, and burns those that adhere to the Jewish law! How pitiful, how contradictory, and how horrible!

CHAP. VI.

OF GENESIS.

ALL the nations by whom the Jews were encompassed had a Genesis, a Theogony, a Cosmogony, long before the Jews existed. Is it not evident, that the Genesis of the Jews was taken from the ancient fables of their neighbours?

- Yaho the ancient god of the Phœnicians unravelled the chaos, the Khautereb; he arranged matter, Muth; he formed man with his breath, Calpi; he gave him a garden for his habitation, Aden or Eden; he forbade him to meddle with the great serpent Ophioneus, as we are told in the ancient fragment of Pherecidus. What a conformity with the Genesis of the Jews!

Is it not natural to suppose that a petty ignorant people would in the course of time, borrow the fables of the great people who invented the arts ?

It was likewise a received opinion in Asia, that God had formed the world in six periods of time, which the Chaldeans who were so long anterior to the Jews, called *six gahambars*. This was also an opinion of the ancient Indians. The Jews, then, who wrote Genesis, are merely imitators ; they mixed their own absurdities with these fables, and we must confess, it is difficult for us to abstain from laughter, when we hear of a serpent talking familiarly with Eve ; of God speaking to the serpent ; of God's promenade in the garden of Eden at noon-day ; of God making small-clothes for Adam, and an apron for his wife Eve. All the rest appears equally senseless. Many Jews themselves are ashamed of these tales, and they have been considered by them as allegorical fables. How can we interpret literally what the Jews have regarded as allegories ?

Neither the histories of Judges, Kings, nor any of the Prophets quote a single passage of Genesis. None of them have spoken of Adam's rib being taken from his side, to make a woman of ; nor of the tree of knowledge of good and evil ; nor of the serpent that tempted Eve ; nor of original sin ; nor, in short, of any of these imaginations. Once more ; have we any rational motives for believing them ?

Their rhapsodies demonstrate, that they have pilfered all their notions from the Phœnicians, Chaldeans, and Egyptians, in the same way as they pilfered their goods, when they had it in their power. Even the name of Israel was borrowed from the Chaldeans, as Philo confesses in the first page of the narrative of his deputation to Caligula. These are his words, " the Chaldeans give to the righteous the name of Israel, *seeing God*." Yet we are such simpletons in the West, as to fancy that every thing which these Eastern barbarians had stolen belonged exclusively to themselves.

CHAP. VII.

OF THE MANNERS OF THE JEWS.

IF we pass from Jewish fables to Jewish manners, do we not find them as abominable as their tales are absurd? According to their own confession, they are a troop of brigands, who carry into the wilderness all that they stole from the Egyptians. Joshua, their chief, passes the Jordan by a miracle similar to that of the Red Sea, and for why? To put fire and sword to a city he was an entire stranger to, the walls of which God caused to fall by the sound of trumpets.

The fables of the Greeks had more of humanity in them. Amphion built cities by the sound of his flute; Joshua destroys them, and gives up to fire and sword, old men, women, children, and cattle. Was there ever a more senseless brutality? He pardons only a prostitute who had betrayed her country. What occasion had he for the perfidy of this miserable woman, since the walls fell at the sound of his trumpet, which may be compared to the trumpet of Astolphus, that made every body run away from him? We must remark, by the bye, that this woman called Rahab, the prostitute, was an ancestor of the Jew whom we have since transformed into a God, who likewise reckons himself a descendant of the incestuous Tamar, the impudent Ruth, and the adulterous Bathsheba.

We are then told, that this same Joshua smote thirty-one kings of the country, that is to say, thirty-one village chiefs, who had defended their fire-sides against this troop of assassins. If the author of this history had formed a design of rendering the Jews execrable among other nations, could he have adopted a surer method? To add blasphemy to robbery and barbarity, the author dares say, that all these abominations were committed in the name and by the express command

of God, to whom they were offered up as so many human sacrifices.

These are God's people! Certainly the Hurons, Canadians, and Iroquois were philosophers of humanity, compared to the children of Israel; and yet it was to favour these monsters, that the sun and moon stood still at noon-day! And for why? To give them time to pursue and slay the miserable Ammonites, who were already crushed to death by a shower of great stones, covering a space of five leagues, which God had thrown upon them from the sky. Is this the history of Gargantua? Is this the history of God's people? And which do we find the most insupportable, the excess of horror, or the excess of foolery, continued therein? Is it not increasing this stupidity, to amuse ourselves by combating this detestable collection of fables, which are equally disgraceful to common sense, to virtue, to nature, and to the Deity? If a single adventure, related of this people, had unfortunately been true, all nations would have united to exterminate them; and if they be false, it is not possible to tell lies in a more stupid manner.

CHAP. VIII.

CONTINUATION OF THE MANNERS OF THE JEWS.

WHAT shall we say of a Jephthah, who immolates his own daughter to his imaginary God, of the left-handed Ehud, who assassinates Eglon his king, in the name of the Lord; of the divine Jael, who assassinates General Sisera, by driving a nail into his head; and of the drunken Sampson, whom God favours with so many miracles?

This last is a gross imitation of the fable of Hercules.

Shall we speak of a Levite, who brings his concu-

bine on an ass, with straw and hay, into Guba which belonged to the tribe of Benjamin ; and behold, the Benjamites wish to commit sodomy with this vile priest, in the same way as the Sodomites wished to violate the angels.¹ The Levite makes an arrangement, and abandons his mistress or concubine to them ; they abuse her all night, and the next morning she dies. The Levite takes his knife, and cuts his concubine into twelve pieces, (a thing not very easily done) and thence arises a civil war.

The eleven tribes arm four hundred thousand soldiers, against the tribe of Benjamin. Four hundred thousand soldiers, good God ! in a territory which did not measure fifteen leagues in length, by five or six in breadth ! The Grand Seignior never had half such an army. These Israelites exterminate the tribe of Benjamin, both old and young, women and girls, according to their laudable custom. Six hundred boys escape. It would not be proper to let one tribe perish, therefore six hundred girls, at least, must be given to these six hundred boys.

What do the Israelites do ? There was in the neighbourhood a small city named Jabez ; they take it

¹ The illustrious author has forgot to speak of the angels of Sodom, yet this article was worthy of his attention. If ever there were any abominable extravagancies in the Jewish history, that of the angels, whom the magistrates, officers, and boys, of a whole city wished absolutely to violate, is so horrible, that it cannot be paralleled by any heathen fable, and really makes one's hair stand an end. And yet they dare to write a commentary on these abominable tales ! And they wish to make youth respect them ! And they have the insolence to pity the Brachmans of India, and the Magi of Persia, because God has not revealed these things to them, and because they were not God's people !

And even among ourselves there are muddy souls, so cowardly, and so impudent, as to say to us, believe these infamous stories ; believe them, or the wrath of an avenging God shall fall upon you ; believe, or we will persecute you either in the consistory, or in the conclave ; or at the bar ; or in the buvette ! How long will knaves make wise men tremble ?

by surprize, kill all, massacre every thing, even the cattle, reserving only four hundred girls for four hundred Benjamites !

Two hundred boys remain to be provided for, and it is agreed, that they shall ravish two hundred of the daughters of Shiloh, when they go to dance at the gates of the city !¹

Come on, Tillotson, Sherlock, Clarke, and the rest of your tribe ; say something to justify these cannibal fables ; prove to us that these are all types and figures announcing Jesus Christ !

CHAP. IX.

OF THE JEWISH MANNERS UNDER THEIR KINGS AND PONTIFFS, TO
THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM BY THE ROMANS.

THE Jews obtain a king in spite of the priest Samuel, who does all he can to preserve his usurped authority, and he has the hardihood to say, that " to choose a king is to reject God."²

At length, a herdsman, who sought his father's asses, is elected king by lot. The Jews were then under the yoke of the Canaanites ; they had never had a temple ; their sanctuary was an ark that could be put into a cart.³

The Canaanites had taken their ark from them, at which God was much displeased ; yet he, nevertheless, suffered them to take it, but to be revenged, he gave the piles to the conquerors, and sent mice into their fields. The victors appeased God by returning him his ark, accompanied with five golden mice.⁴

No vengeance nor sacrifice could be more worthy of

¹ Judges xxi. 21.

² 1 Sam. viii. 7.

³ 1 Sam. vi. 11.

⁴ 1 Sam. vi. 4.

the Jewish God. He pardons the Canaanites, but kills fifty thousand and seventy of his own people for having looked into the ark.¹

It is under these propitious circumstances that Saul is elected king of the Jews. In their miserable country there was neither sword nor spear; the Canaanites or Philistines did not permit their Jewish slaves even to sharpen their plough-shares and axes; they were forced to apply to the Philistine labourers for this assistance;² and yet we are told that king Saul had, at first, an army of three hundred thousand men, with whom he gained a great battle.³ Our Gulliver has similar fables, but not such contradictions.

In another battle Saul comes to terms with the pretended king Agag. The prophet Samuel arrives and asks, in the name of the Lord, "Wherefore didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, to slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass?"⁴ and he takes a hatchet and hews king Agag in pieces.⁵ If such an action were true, what kind of people and priests were the Jews?

Saul, who was reproved by the Lord because he had not himself slain king Agag, his prisoner, goes at length to fight against the Philistines, after the death of the meek prophet Samuel. He consults a witch respecting the success of the battle. It is known that witches can raise ghosts. This witch brings out of the ground the ghost of Samuel, but this merely regards the fine philosophy of the Jews. Now for their morality.

A player of the harp, for whom the Deity had caught a tender affection, causes himself to be anointed king during Samuel's life-time; he revolts against his sovereign, and, as the Scripture tells us, collects four hundred wretches. "Every one that was in distress,

¹ 1 Sam. vi. 19.² Ib. xiii. 19, 20.³ Ib. xi. 8.⁴ 1 Sam. xv. 3.⁵ Ib. 33.

and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him."¹

This was a man after God's own heart; so the first thing he does is to assassinate a farmer, named Nabal, because he refused to pay contributions. He marries Nabal's widow, and eighteen other women, without reckoning concubines. He goes to an enemy of his own country, king Achish, who receives him well; and as a recompence for this kind reception, he sacks the villages of the allies of Achish, whom he persuades that he has not meddled with any towns except such as belonged to the Hebrews. We must confess, that highwaymen are less culpable in the eyes of men; but the ways of the Jewish God are not like our ways.

The good king David robs Saul's son, Ishbosheth, of his crown. He causes Mephibosheth, son of his protector, Jonathan, to be assassinated. He delivers up to the Gibeonites two sons of Saul, and five of his grandsons to be put to death. He assassinates Uriah, to screen his adultery with Bathsheba, and yet this abominable Bathsheba was the mother of Solomon, who was an ancestor of Jesus Christ.

The remainder of the Jewish history is nothing but a tissue of consecrated crimes. Solomon begins by killing his brother Adonijah.

If God granted to this Solomon the gift of wisdom, he appears to have refused him the gifts of humanity, justice, continence, and honour. He has seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. The song imputed to him is written in the style of these indecent books, which are calculated to put modesty to the blush. It is altogether about babbles, and kisses on the mouth, a belly like a heap of wheat, voluptuous attitudes and agitations. At length he finishes by saying, "We have a little sister, and she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for? If she be a wall, we

¹ 1 Sam. xxii. 2.

will build upon her a palace of silver : and if she be a door, we will inclose her with boards of cedar.”¹

Such were the manners of the wisest man among the Jews, or, at least, the manners imputed to him out of respect by miserable rabbins, and Christian divines, whose notions are still more absurd.

At length, to unite an excess of ridicule with this excess of immodesty, the priests have decided, that the belly, the bobbies, and kisses of the Shulamite, are an emblem and a type of the marriage of Jesus Christ with his church.

Of all the kings of Judah and of Samaria, there were very few of them who were not either assassins or assassinated, until this den of robbers, who massacred one another in the public places and the temple during the time that Titus besieged them, fell under the iron chains of the Romans with the rest of this miserable people of God, of whom five-sixths had long been dispersed over Asia, and sold in the markets of the Roman cities, each Jew being valued at the price of a pig, an animal which was certainly less impure than this nation, if it were such as its historians and prophets represent it.

No one can deny that the Jews have written these abominations ; and when we thus assemble them before our eyes, our hearts revolt at them. These, then, are the heralds of Providence, the forerunners of the reign of Jesus. Sayest thou, O Abbadie, that all the Jewish history is a prediction of the Church ; that all the prophets have foretold Jesus ? Let us, then, examine the prophets.

CHAP. X.

OF THE PROPHETS.

PROPHET, Nabim, Roheim—speaking, seeing, guessing, is all the same thing. All ancient authors agree that the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, and all the Asiatic nations had their prophets and conjurors. These nations were long anterior to the little people called the Jews, which, when it formed a horde in a corner of land, had no language but that of its neighbours, and which, as we have before shewn, borrowed from the Phœnicians even the names of its God, Eloha, Jehovah, Adonai, Sadai ; which, in short, took all its rites and ceremonies from its surrounding neighbours, though it continually declaimed against them.

It was said by some writer, that the first seer, or prophet, was the first knave that met with a simpleton ; thus is prophecy established from the most remote antiquity. But to fraud, let us add fanaticism ; these two monsters dwell together very peaceably in human skulls. We have witnessed the arrival in London of hordes from the heart of Languedoc and Vivarais, who were as much prophets as those of the Jews, and joined the most horrible enthusiasm to the most disgusting falsehoods. We have witnessed Jurieu prophesying in Holland. There were always such impostors, and not only wretches who predicted, but other wretches who imagined prophecies spoken by ancient personages.

The world has been filled with Sibyls and Nostradamuses. The Alcoran reckons two hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets. Bishop Epiphanius, in his notes on the pretended Canon of the Apostles, reckons seventy-three Jewish prophets, and ten prophetesses. The trade of prophet among the Jews was neither a dignity nor a degree, nor a profession in the state ; they were not admitted prophets as doctors are

admitted at Oxford and Cambridge. Let those prophesy that would ; it was sufficient to have, or to believe they had, or to feign they had, the calling of the spirit of God. Futurity was announced by dancing and playing on the psaltery. Saul, although he was rebuked, took it into his head to be a prophet. During civil wars each party had its prophet, as we have our Grub Street writers. The parties treated each other reciprocally as fools, visionaries, liars, and knaves, and in this alone they spoke truth. "The prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad," says Hosea, chap. ix. ver. 7.

The prophets of Jerusalem are fanciful and deceitful men, said Saphoniah, a Jerusalem prophet. They are all something like our apothecary, Moore, who inserts in the newspapers, "Take my pills and beware of counterfeits."

When the prophet Micaiah is predicting misfortunes to the kings of Samaria and Judah, the prophet Zedekiah gives him a box on the cheek, saying, "Which way went the spirit of the Lord from me to speak unto thee?"¹

Jeremiah, who prophesied in favour of Nebuchadnezzar, a Jewish tyrant, put cords round his neck, and a yoke on his back, which was a type, and he was to send this type to the neighbouring petty kings, to invite them to submission to Nebuchadnezzar. The prophet Ananias, who looked upon Jeremiah as a traitor, took his cords from him, and threw his yoke on the ground.

Here we have Hosea, whom God orders to take a whore, and to beget sons of a whore : "Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms, and children of whoredoms."² Hosea punctually obeys ; he takes Gomer, daughter of Diblaim, who brings him three children ; thus this prophecy, and this whoredom, lasted at least three

¹ 2 Chron. xviii. 23.

² Hosea i. 2.

years. But this would not satisfy the Jewish God, who orders Hosea to sleep with a woman that had already cuckolded her husband. This cost the prophet no more than fifteen pieces of silver, and a bushel and a half of barley, which is purchasing adultery at a cheap rate.¹

It cost the patriarch Judah still less, in his incest with his daughter-in-law, Tamar.²

There we have Ezekiel, who after having slept three hundred and ninety days on his left side; and forty on his right side; after having swallowed a roll of parchment, and eaten a *sir reverend* on his bread, by the express command of God, introduces God himself, the Creator of the Universe, who speaks thus to young Aholibah: "Thou hast increased and waxed great; thy breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness."³—"But thou hast built thy high place at every head of the way, and hast opened thy feet (or thighs) to every one that passed by, and multiplied thy whoredoms."⁴

"Her sister Aholibah was more corrupt in her inordinate love than she—for she doated upon her paramours, whose flesh is like the flesh of asses, and whose issue is like the issue of horses."⁵

One day, when our friend General Withers heard these prophecies read to him, he asked in what brothel the holy scriptures had been written?

Prophecies are seldom read; it is difficult to go through these lengthy and enormous rhapsodies. Fashionable men who have read Gulliver and Atlantis, know neither Hosea nor Ezekiel.

When we point out to sensible people, these execrable passages, buried in the rubbish of prophecy, they cannot recover from their astonishment.

¹ Hosea iii. 2.

² Gen. xxxviii. 18.

³ Ezek. xvi. 7, 8.

⁴ Ib. 25.

⁵ Ch. xxiii. 11, 20.

They cannot conceive, that an Isaiah¹ should walk stark naked in the middle of Jerusalem; that an Ezekiel should cut his beard into three portions; that a Jonah should be three days in a whale's belly, &c. Were they to read these shameless indecencies in a profane book, they would throw it away in disgust. It is the Bible; they remain confounded; they hesitate; they condemn the abominations, and dare not condemn the book that contains them. It requires time, before they dare to make use of common sense, but, in the end, they detest what knaves and simpletons have taught them to adore.

When were these irrational and immodest books written? Nobody knows. The most probable opinion is that the greater part of the books attributed to Solomon, Daniel, and others, were written in Alexandria; but what matters it as to time and place? Is it not sufficient to witness in them the most outrageous folly, and the most infamous debauchery?

How is it, then, that the Jews have held them in veneration? Because they were Jews. We must likewise consider, that all these extravagant monuments were preserved only by priests and scribes. We know how scarce books were in all countries, where the art of printing (which the Chinese invented) reached us so late. We shall be still more astonished when we see fathers of the Church adopt these disgusting reveries, or allege them in support of their sects.

We come, at length, from the old covenant to the new one. Let us proceed to Jesus, and to the establishment of Christianity.

¹ Isaiah xx. 3.

CHAP. XI.

OF THE PERSON OF JESUS.

JESUS was born at a time when fanaticism was still dominant, but when decency began to shew itself a little. The long commerce of the Jews with the Greeks and Romans, had given to the respectable part of the nation manners less vulgar and irrational; but the populace, who are always incorrigible, preserved the same spirit of folly.

Some Jews, who were oppressed under the kings of Syria, and under the Romans, had then imagined that God would at some time send them a Liberator, a Messiah. This expectation ought naturally to be fulfilled in the person of Herod. He was their king, and an ally of the Romans; he had rebuilt their temple, the architecture of which greatly surpassed that of Solomon, since he had filled up a precipice on which that edifice was erected. The people no longer groaned under a foreign yoke; they paid no imposts but to their own monarch; the Jewish worship flourished, and the ancient laws were respected; Jerusalem, we must confess, was then in its greatest splendour.

Idleness and superstition brought forth many factions or religious societies; Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenians, Judaites, Therapeutæ, and Johnists, or disciples of John, in the same way as the Papists have their Molinists, Jansenists, Jacobins, and Cordeliers. However, at that time no one spoke of the expectation of a Messiah. Neither Josephus nor Philo, who have entered into such minute details of the Jewish history, say that there was any expectation of the coming of a Christ, an Anointed, a Liberator, a Redeemer, of whom they had then less need than ever. And if there had been one, it must have been Herod. There

was, in reality, a party or sect called Herodians, who acknowledged Herod to be the messenger of God.

At all times this people had given the names of Anointed, of Messiah, of Christ, to any one that had been serviceable to them; sometimes it was given to their own pontiffs, and sometimes to foreign princes. The Jew who compiled the reveries of Isaiah, makes him employ a vile flattery, very worthy of a Jewish slave: "Thus saith the Lord to his Anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden to subdue nations before him," &c. The 1st book of Kings² calls the wicked Jehu, Anointed. A prophet announces to Hazael, king of Damascus, that he is the Messiah and the Anointed of the Most High.

Ezekiel says to the king of Tyrus, "Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty—thou art the Anointed Cherub."³ If this prince of Tyrus had known that these titles were given to him in Judea, it rested only with himself to have been a kind of demi-god. He had an apparent right to such a title, supposing Ezekiel to have been inspired. The Evangelists have not said so much for Jesus.

However, it is certain, that no Jew either hoped, desired, or announced an Anointed, a Messiah, in the time of Herod the Great, under whom, it is said, Jesus was born. After the death of Herod, when Judea was governed as a Roman Province, and another Herod was established, by the Romans, tetrarch of the little barbarous district of Galilee, many fanatics took upon themselves to preach among the ignorant people, particularly in this Galilee, where the Jews were more ignorant than elsewhere. It is thus, that Fox, a poor cobbler, established in our own times the sect of the Quakers, among the peasantry in one of our counties. The first that founded a Calvinist church in France, was a woollen carder, named

¹ Isaiah xlv. 1. ² 2 Kings ix. 6. ³ Ezek. xxviii. 12, 14.

John Le Clerc. It is thus, that Muncer, John of Leydon, and others, founded Anabaptism among the poor people in some of the cantons of Germany.

I have seen the Convulsionists in France, institute a small sect, among the mob in one of the *Fauxbourgs* of Paris. Sectarians began in this way all the world over. They are generally beggars who rail against the government, and finish either by becoming chiefs of a party, or by being hanged. Jesus was put to death at Jerusalem, without having been anointed; John the Baptist had already been condemned to death. Each of them left some followers among the dregs of the people. Those of John established themselves towards Arabia, where they still exist. Those of Jesus were at first very obscure, but as soon as they became associated with some of the Greeks, they began to be known.

The Jews under Tiberius having carried their accustomed knaveries to a higher pitch than ever, and having likewise seduced and robbed Fulvia, wife of Saturninus, were driven from Rome, and could not be re-established there, except by giving much money. They were likewise severely punished under Caligula and Claudius.

Their disasters served in some measure to embolden the Galileans, who comprised the new sect, to separate themselves from the Jewish communion. At length, they found some who were a little acquainted with letters, who put themselves at their head, and who wrote in their favour against the Jews. This was what produced such an immense number of Gospels, a Greek word, signifying "Good-news." Each gave a life of Jesus; none of them agreed with the rest, but all of them had some resemblance by the number of incredible prodigies which, to vie with each other, they attribute to their founder.

The Synagogue, on its part, seeing that a new sect had sprang up in its bosom, and that it was vending

a life of Jesus, very injurious to the Sanhedrin, began to make enquiries respecting this man, to whom it had not hitherto paid any attention.

We have still a stupid work of that time, entitled "Sepher Toldos Jeschut." It appears to have been written many years after the death of Jesus, during the time when the Gospels were compiled. This book, like all others of the Jews and Christians, is full of prodigies, but extravagant as it is, we must confess that many statements contained in it are much more probable than those related in our Gospels.

It is said in the "Toldos Jeschut," that Jesus was the son of a woman named Mirja, who was married in Bethlehem to a poor man of the name of Jocanam. There was in the neighbourhood a soldier of the name of Joseph Pander, a well-shaped, good-looking man, who fell in love with Mirja or Maria. As the Hebrews do not express their vowels, they frequently take *a* for *j*.

Mirja became with child by Pander. Jocanam, who was seized with confusion and despondency, quitted Bethlehem, and went to secrete himself in Babylon, where there were still many Jews. The conduct of Mirja disgraced her, and her son Jesus or Jeschut, was declared a bastard by the judges of the city. When he became old enough to be admitted into the public school, he placed himself among the legitimate children; however, he was compelled to leave this class.

Hence arose the animosity against priests, which he manifested when he had attained manhood; he lavished on them the most opprobrious epithets, calling them "a race of vipers and whitened sepulchres."

Having, at length, quarrelled with Judas, a Jew, regarding a question of interest, as well as concerning some religious points, Judas denounced him to the Sanhedrin. He was arrested, began to cry, and begged pardon, but in vain; he was flogged, stoned, and afterwards put to death.

Such is the substance of this history. Insipid fables,

and impertinent miracles, have since been added, which injured it much, but the book was known in the second century. Celsus quotes it; Origen refutes it, and it has reached us quite disfigured.

The chief part of what I have just stated is certainly more probable, more natural, and more conformable, to what passes in the world in our own days, than any of the fifty gospels of the Christians. It was much more likely that Joseph Pander was the father of Mirja's child, than that an angel came from heaven, with God's compliments to a carpenter's wife, in the same way as Jupiter sent Mercury to visit Alcmena.

Every thing that they tell us about Jesus is worthy of the Old Testament, and of Bedlam. They bring I know not what kind of *Agion pneuma*, a Holy Ghost, that had hitherto never been spoken of, and which they have since told us is the third part of God.

Jesus then becomes the Son of God, and of a Jewess; he is not yet God himself, but he is a superior Being. He works miracles. The first he performs is, to have himself conveyed by the devil to the top of one of the mountains of Judea, where he could discover all the kingdoms of the earth. His raiment appeared white; what a miracle! He changes water into wine at a repast, where the guests were already drunk.¹ He dries a fig tree, because it does not furnish him with figs to his breakfast in the month of February. Yet the author of this tale has at least the honesty

¹ It is difficult to say which of those pretended prodigies is the most ridiculous. Many people give a preference to that of the wine at the marriage of Cana. That God should say to his mother, the Jewess, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" is a strange thing; but that he should feast with drunkards, and should change six pitchers of water into wine for men that had already drunk too much, is a blasphemy as execrable as it is impertinent. The Hebrew text uses a word which answers to "tipsy," or half drunk; the Vulgate says "inebriate."

to tell us, that it was not the season for figs. He goes to sup with women, and then with publicans, and yet it is pretended in his history that he looked upon these publicans as bad characters. He goes into the temple, that is to say, into the large inclosure where the priests resided, in the court where retail dealers were authorized by law to sell fowls, pigeons, and lambs, to those who came to sacrifice. He takes a whip, and plays upon the shoulders of the dealers, whom he drives out, as well as their fowls, pigeons, sheep, and oxen, and strews their money on the ground. Yet he is suffered to proceed without interruption! And if we believe the book attributed to John, they content themselves with asking him to work a miracle, in order to shew his authority, to play pranks like these in a place so respected.

It was a very great miracle, for thirty or forty tradesmen to suffer themselves to be kicked, and to lose their money, by one man, without saying any thing to him. There is nothing in Don Quixote which approaches such extravagance as this. But instead of performing the miracle they demand of him, he contents himself with saying, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews reply, according to John, "Forty and six years was this temple building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?"

It was asserting a great falsehood to say that Herod had been employed forty-six years in building the temple of Jerusalem. The Jews, in their reply, could not make use of such a falsehood. By the bye, this alone shews us that the Gospels have been written, by men who were scarcely acquainted with any thing.

After this foolish enterprize, Jesus is said to have preached in the villages. What kind of discourses do they make him hold forth? He compares the kingdom of heaven to a grain of mustard seed; to a morsel of leaven, mixed in three measures of meal; to a net,

that catches both good and bad fish ; to a king, who kills his chickens to make a feast at his son's wedding, and sends his servants to invite the neighbours to it. The neighbours kill the servants that request them to dine, and the king kills the people who killed his servants, and burns their city. He then sends to compel the beggars on the highway to come and dine with him, and perceiving a poor guest who had no garment, instead of giving him one, he causes him to be thrown into a dungeon. This is the kingdom of heaven, according to Matthew.

In the other discourses, the kingdom of heaven is always compared to a usurer, who will absolutely have sent. per cent. profit. They confess, that our Archbishop Tillotson preaches in a different style.

How did the history of Jesus finish ? By events, which have happened, both in our own country and in the rest of the world, to many people who wished to stir up the populace, without being sufficiently capable either of arming that population, or of gaining to themselves powerful protectors. They most commonly finish by being hanged. Jesus was put to death, for having called his superiors, " a race of vipers, and whited sepulchres."¹ He was executed publicly, but he rose from the grave privately. At length he ascended into heaven, in the presence of eighty of his disciples, without any other person in Judea seeing his ascension in the clouds, which was, however, easy to be seen, and ought to have made a great noise in the world.

Our Creed, called by the Papists *Credo*, which was attributed to the apostles, though evidently fabricated more than four hundred years after these apostles, acquaints us, that before Jesus ascended into heaven, he went on a tour into hell. You will remark, that not a single word is said about this journey in the Gospels, and yet it is one of the principal articles of

¹ Matt. xxiii. 27.

the Christian faith. We cannot be Christians, if we do not believe that Jesus descended into hell.

Who was, then, the first that imagined this journey? It was Athanasius, about three hundred and fifty years after the event. It is in his treatise against Apollinarus, on the incarnation of the Lord, where he mentions that the soul of Jesus descended into hell, while his body remained in the sepulchre.

His words are worthy of attention, and shew us with what sagacity and wisdom Athanasius reasoned.

Here follow his own words: "It was necessary after his death, that his divers essential parts should perform divers functions; that his body should remain in the sepulchre to destroy corruption, and that his soul should go into hell to vanquish death."

The African St. Augustin, in a letter that he wrote to Evodus, seems to agree with him, *Quis ergo nisi infidelis negaverit fuisse apud inferos Christum?*

Jerome, his cotemporary, was nearly of the same opinion; and it was during the time of Augustin and Jerome, that this *Credo* was composed, which, among ignorant people, passed for the Apostles' Creed.

Thus were opinions, creeds, and sects, established. But how could these detestable fooleries be credited? How did they overturn the other absurdities of the Greeks and Romans, and, at last, the empire itself? How have they caused so many evils, so many civil wars, lighted so many faggots, and spilled so much blood? We are going to account for it.

CHAP. XII.

OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CHRISTIANITY, AND PARTICULARLY
OF PAUL.

WHEN the first Galileans spread themselves among the populace of the Greeks and Romans, they found this populace infected with all the absurd traditions

that can take possession of ignorant minds enamoured with fables. They had gods disguised in the shape of bulls, horses, swans, and serpents, to seduce women and girls. Magistrates, and respectable citizens, did not admit of these extravagancies, but the populace fed on them, and these constituted the pagan mob. I fancy I see the followers of Fox dispute with those of Brown. It was not difficult for Jews, possessed with devils, to make their reveries believed by the ignorant, who believed other reveries equally impertinent.

Novelty attracted weak minds, who grew tired of their old follies; and ran to hear new tales, just like the mob at Bartholomew fair, demanding a new farce, and becoming disgusted with the old one, which they have so often seen repeated.

If we believe the books of the Christians, we are told that Peter, son of Jonas,¹ dwelt with Simon the tanner, in a garret at Joppa, where he brought to life again the mantua-maker, Dorcas.

In the Chapter of Lucian, entitled *Philopatris*, he speaks of a Galilean "with a bald forehead, and large nose, who was carried to the third heaven."

See how he speaks of an assembly of Christians, whom he fell in with: "Tatterdemajons almost naked, with fierce looks and the walk of madmen, who moan and make contortions; swearing by the Son who was begotten by the Father, predicting a thousand misfortunes to the empire, and cursing the emperor." Such were the first Christians.

He who had given the greatest notoriety to this sect was this Paul with the large nose and bald forehead, whom Lucian ridicules. The writings of Paul, it appears to me, are sufficient to shew how far Lucian was right. What nonsense he writes to the society of Christians, forming at Rome among the Jewish rabble. "Circumcision verily profiteth if thou keep the law, but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made

¹ Acts ix. 39.

uncircumcision.”—Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law.* If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God.”†

In thus expressing himself, Paul spoke evidently as a Jew, and not as a Christian.

What a discourse to the Corinthians, “Our fathers were all baptised unto Moses, in the cloud and in the sea.”‡ Was not Cardinal Bembo right in calling these epistles *Epistolæ*, and advising people not to read them?

What shall we think of a man who says to the Thessalonians, “Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak,”§ and who in the same epistle announces that they ought to pray and prophesy with their heads covered?¶

Is his quarrel with the other apostles that of a wise and moderate man? Does not every thing shew him to be a party man? He is a Christian; he teaches Christianity, and goes seven days successively to sacrifice in the temple of Jerusalem, by the advice of James. He writes to the Galatians, “Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.”‡ And he afterwards circumcises his disciple Timothy, who, as the Jews pretend, was the son of a Greek, and a prostitute. He obtrudes himself among the apostles, and boasts of being as much an apostle as the rest of them: “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus Christ, our Lord? Are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. Have we not a power to eat and to drink? have we not a power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord? Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges?” What frightful things in this passage! The

* Rom. ii. 25. † Chap. iii. 31. ‡ Chap. iv. 2. § 1 Cor. x. 1, 2.
 ¶ 1 Cor. xiv. 34. † 1 Cor. xi. 5. ‡ Gal. v. 2.

right of living at the expence of those he has subjugated ; the right of making them pay the expences of his wife or his sister ; and, at last, the proof that Jesus had brothers, and the presumption that Mary, or Mirja, was brought to bed more than once.

I should be glad to know of whom he is speaking again in his 2d Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xi. " For such are false apostles. Howbeit, wherein soever any is bold, I am bold also. Are they Hebrews ? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham ? So am I. Are they the ministers of Christ ? I am more ; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Five times received I forty stripes, save one ; thrice was I beaten with rods ; once was I stoned ; a night and a day I have been in the deep."

Behold this Paul, who was twenty-four hours in the deep without being drowned ! It is a third of the adventure of Jonah. But does he not here clearly manifest his base jealousy of Peter and the other apostles, by thinking to carry the palm from them, because he has received more stripes and floggings than they have done ?

Does not his fury for domineering appear in all its insolence, when he says to the same Corinthians, " This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established. Being now absent, I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare."¹ To what simple fools, to what kind of besotted creatures, did he thus address himself like a tyrannical master ? Those to whom he had the hardihood to assert that he was carried to the third heaven. Impudent and dastardly impostor ! Where is this third heaven in which thou hast travelled ? Is it in Venus or in Mars ?

We laugh at Mahomet, when his commentators pre-

¹ 2 Cor. xiii. 1, 2.

tend that he visited seven heavens in succession, in a single night; but Mahomet, in the Alcoran at least, does not speak of such an extravagance as that which is imputed to him; yet Paul dares to assert that he has performed half of this journey.

Who was this Paul, then, who still makes so much noise, and who is every day quoted at random? He says he was a Roman citizen, which I dare affirm to be an impudent falsehood. No Jew was a Roman citizen, except under the Decii and Philips. If he were of Tarsus, it was neither a Roman city nor a Roman colony for more than a hundred years after Paul. If he were a native of Giscalus, as St. Jerome states, this village was in Galilee, and, assuredly, the Galileans had never the honour of being Roman citizens.

He was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel; that is to say, he was one of Gamaliel's domestics. Indeed, it is remarked, that he took care of the clothes of those who stoned Stephen, which is the employ of a valet. The Jews pretend that he wished to marry Gamaliel's daughter. We see some traces of this adventure in the ancient book which contains the history of Thecla.

It is not astonishing that the daughter of Gamaliel should reject a little bald-headed valet, whose eyebrows hung over a deformed nose, and who was bandy-legged. It is thus that the "Acts of Thecla" describe him. Disdained, as he deserved to be, by Gamaliel and his daughter, he joined himself with the infant sect of Cephas, James, Matthew, and Barnabas, in order to annoy the Jews.

Any one, who has the least spark of reason would judge, that this cause, which has been assigned for the apostacy of this miserable Jew, is more natural than that attributed to him. How can we persuade ourselves that a celestial light knocked him off horseback at noon-day; that a heavenly voice addressed him;

that God said to him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Ought we not to blush at such stupidity?

If God had wished to prevent the disciples of Jesus from being persecuted, would he not have addressed himself to the princes of the nation, rather than to Gamaliel's valet? Have they met with less chastisement since Saul fell from his horse? Was not Saul, Paul himself, chastised? What was the utility of this ridiculous miracle? I call heaven and earth to witness, (if I may be permitted to make use of these improper words, heaven and earth) that there never was a legend more stupid, more fanatical, more disgusting, nor more deserving of our horror and contempt.

CHAP. XIII.

OF THE GOSPELS.

As soon as the societies of half Jews, half Christians, had by degrees established themselves among the ignorant people at Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and Alexandria, some time after Vespasian, each of these little societies wished to make its own gospel. Fifty of them have been reckoned, and there were many more. It is known that they all contradict one another; this could not be otherwise, since they were all composed in different places. All of them agree only that their Jesus was the son of Mary, or Mirja, and that he was put to death; all of them likewise ascribe to him as many prodigies as are to be found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

Luke dresses up a genealogy for him quite different to that planned by Matthew; and neither of them dream about giving us the genealogy of Mary, who was his only parent. The enthusiast Pascal cries out, "This is not acting in concert." Undoubtedly not.

Each has written extravagancies for his little society, according to his own fancy. This accounts for one Evangelist pretending that the little Jesus was brought up in Egypt, and another saying that he was brought up at Bethlehem. One of them makes him go only once to Jerusalem, while the others say that he went three times. One of them causes three wise men, whom we call three kings, to be conducted by a new star, and causes all the little children of the country to be put to death by the first Herod, who was then near the end of his days. The others are silent about the star, and the wise men, and the massacre.¹ At length, to explain these contradictions, we have been compelled to make a concordance, and this concordance is less concordant than the matters they wished to reconcile.

Almost all the Gospels, which the Christians never made known but to their own little flocks, were visibly forged after the taking of Jerusalem. We have a very evident proof of it in that attributed to Matthew. This book puts into the mouth of Jesus these words to the Jews. "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar." A forger is always discovered in some part of his work. During the siege of Jerusalem, there was a Zacharias, son of Barachias, killed between the temple and the altar, by the faction of the zealots. This

¹ The massacre of the innocents is certainly the height of folly, as well as the tale of the three wise men conducted by a star. How could Herod, who was then almost on his death bed, fear being dethroned by the son of a village carpenter, who was just born. Herod died only two or three years after, at the age of seventy. It would have been necessary for this child to make war against the empire. Could such a fear take possession of any man, who was not an absolute fool? Is it possible that they have proposed to human credulity such stupid fooleries, which outdo Robert the Devil, and John of Paris? Man is a very contemptible being when he suffers himself to be governed in such a way!

enables us easily to detect the imposition, otherwise we might have read over the whole Bible to enable us to do so. The Greeks and Romans read but little, and the Gospels were entirely unknown to them. Lies were told with impunity.

An evident proof that the Gospel attributed to Matthew, was not written till a long time after him by some miserable half Jew, half Christian Hellenist, is this famous passage: "If he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."¹

There was no church in the time of Jesus and of Matthew. Church is a Greek word. The assembly of the people of Athens styled itself *Eccllesia*. This expression was only adopted by the Christians in process of time, when they had obtained a kind of government. It is clear, then, that an impostor took the name of Matthew, and wrote his Gospel in very bad Greek. I confess it would be comical enough for Matthew, who had himself been a publican, to compare the heathens with publicans. But whoever might have been the author of this ridiculous comparison, none but a mad-cap among the most illiterate of the people would have looked upon a Roman knight, who was authorized to receive the imposts established by government, as a man that ought to be despised. The idea alone is destructive of all administration, and not only unworthy of a man whom God had inspired, but unworthy the lackey of an honest citizen.

There are two Gospels of the infancy. The first relates, that a young beggar patted the little Jesus, his comrade, behind, and that the little Jesus immediately killed him. *Kai para kremai peson apeidonon*. At another time he made birds of clay, which flew away. His method of learning the alphabet was quite divine. Those tales are not more ridiculous than that of his being carried off by the devil, that of his trans-

¹ Matt. xviii. 17.

figuration on Mount Tabor, that of the water changed into wine, and that of the devil's being sent into a herd of swine. Thus this Gospel of the infancy was long in veneration.

The second Gospel of the infancy is not less curious. Mary, who was conducting her son into Egypt, met with some girls that were deploring the loss of their brother, who had been transformed into a mule. Mary and her little one did not fail to change the mule into its former shape of a man, but we do not know whether or not the miserable animal was any better for the change. As they proceeded on the road, the wandering family met with two robbers, one named Dumachus, the other Titus. Dumachus was for robbing the Virgin, and doing something still more scandalous, but Titus took Mary's part, and gave forty drachms to persuade him to let the family go by, without doing them any injury. Jesus declared to the Holy Virgin, that Dumachus should be the wicked thief, and Titus the good thief; that they would one day be executed with him; that Titus should go into paradise, and Dumachus to the devil.

The Gospel according to St. James, elder brother of Jesus, or that of Peter Barjonas, a Gospel known and boasted of by Tertullian and by Origen, was in still greater repute. It was called *Proto-Evangelion*, or First Gospel. It was perhaps the first which spoke of the new star, of the arrival of the wise men, and of the little children whom the first Herod ordered to be massacred.

There is still a kind of Gospel or Acts of John in which Jesus is said to have danced with his apostles the evening before he died; and the circumstance is rendered probable, as the Therapeutæ were really accustomed to dance in a ring, a ceremony that must be very pleasing to our heavenly Father.

Why does the most scrupulous Christian now laugh without remorse at all these gospels and acts which are

no longer in the canon ; and why does he not dare to laugh at those adopted by the church ? They are nearly the same tales ; but fanaticism adores in one name what appears the height of ridicule in another.

At length, four Gospels are chosen ; and the great reason for having that number, as stated by St. Irenæus, is, that there are only four cardinal points ; that God is seated on cherubims, and that cherubims have four different shapes. St. Jerome, in his preface to Mark's Gospel, adds to the four winds and four-shaped animals, the four rings of the poles, on which the box called the ark was carried.

Theophilus, of Antioch, proves that as Lazarus was dead only four days, we can consequently admit only four Gospels ; St. Cyprian proves the same thing by the four rivers that watered paradise. We must be very impious not to yield to such reasons as these.

However, previous to any preference being given to these four Gospels, the fathers of the two first centuries scarcely ever quoted any except the gospels which are now styled apocryphal. This is an incontestible proof, that our four Gospels were not written by those to whom they are attributed. I wish they were so. I wish, for example, Luke had written that which goes under his name. I would say to Luke, " How darest thou maintain that Jesus was born under the governorship of Cyreneus, or Quirinus, when it is attested that Quirinus was not governor of Syria, till more than ten years afterwards ? How hast thou the face to say, that Augustus ordered all the world to be taxed, and that Mary went to Bethlehem for that purpose ? A tax on all the world ! What an expression ! Thou hast heard that Augustus had a book which contained a detail of the forces of the empire, and its finances ; but a tax on all the subjects of the empire is what he never could have thought of, still less could he think of a tax on all the world. No writer, either Greek, Roman, or barbarian, has mentioned such an

extravagance. Behold thee, then, convicted of a most enormous falsehood, and yet thy book must be respected !”

But who fabricated these four Gospels? Is it not probable that they were written by Christian Hellenists, since the Old Testament is scarcely ever quoted, except from the Septant version, which was unknown in Judea? The apostles knew no more about the Greek language than Jesus did. How could they have quoted the Septant? Nothing but the miracle of Pentecost could teach Greek to ignorant Jews.

What a collection of contrarieties and falsehoods remain in these four Gospels! Were there only one, it would suffice to shew them to be works of ignorance. Did we find only the single tale given by Luke, that Jesus was born under the governorship of Cyreneus, when Augustus ordered all the world to be taxed; would not this falsehood alone cause us to throw away the book with contempt? In the first place, there never was such a taxation, and no author speaks of it. Secondly, Cyreneus was not governor of Syria, till ten years after the epocha of the birth of Jesus. In the Gospels there are almost as many errors as words, and thus it is they succeed with the people.

CHAP. XIV.

HOW THE FIRST CHRISTIANS CONDUCTED THEMSELVES AMONG
THE ROMANS, AND HOW THEY FORGED VERSES
ATTRIBUTED TO THE SIBYLS, &c.

PEOPLE of common sense ask how this tissue of fables so stupidly offensive to reason, these blasphemies, which impute so many horrid crimes to the Deity, could obtain any credit. They might, indeed, have been astonished if the first Christians had con-

verted the emperor's court, or the Roman senate ; but an abject mob addressed itself to a populace not less despicable. This is so true, that the Emperor Julian said in Discourse to the Christians, " It was enough for you at first to seduce a few servants, a few beggars, such as Cornelius and Sergius. But let me be regarded as the most impudent of impostors, if among those who embraced your sect under Tiberius and Claudius, there was a single man of birth or merit."

The first reasoning Christians, then, exclaimed in the public places and victualling-houses, to the Pagans who attempted to reason with them. " Be not startled with our mysteries ; you have recourse to expiations to purge yourselves of your crimes, but we have an expiation far more salutary. Your oracles are inferior to ours ; and what we offer as a proof to convince you that our sect is the only true one is, that your own oracles have predicted all that we teach, and all that was done by our Lord Jesus Christ. Have you not heard of the Sibyls ?"—" Yes," replied the Pagan disputants to those of Galilee, " all the Sibyls were inspired by Jupiter himself ; their predictions are all true."—" Very well," replied the Galileans, " we will shew you Sibylline verses which clearly announce Jesus Christ, and then you must acknowledge we are right."

Behold them immediately forging the most stupid Greek verses that were ever composed ; verses similar to those of Blackmore and Gibson, of Grub Street. They ascribe them to the Sibyls, and for the space of more than four hundred years they did not cease to establish Christianity on this proof, which was on a level with the understandings of both the deceivers and the deceived. This first attempt having succeeded, we even find these puerile impostors attributing to the Sibyls acrostic verses, all of which commenced by the letters composing the name of Jesus Christ.

Lactantius has preserved, as authentic pieces, a great portion of these rhapsodies. To these fables they

added miracles, which they sometimes performed even in public. It is true, that they did not raise the dead, like Elisha;¹ they did not arrest the sun in its course, like Joshua; they did not cross the sea dry-shod, like Moses; they did not, like Jesus, cause themselves to be transported by the devil to the top of a little mountain in Galilee, where they could discover all the kingdoms of the earth: but they cured the fever when on its decline, and even the itch as soon as the patient had been bathed, blooded, purged, and rubbed. They, likewise, cast out devils, which was the principal object of the apostles' mission. It is said, in more than one Gospel, that Jesus sent them purposely to cast out devils. This was an ancient prerogative of God's people. We know that there were exorcists at Jerusalem, who cured the possessed by putting into their noses a little of the root called Baruth, and by muttering a few words taken from Solomon's Song. Jesus himself confesses that the Jews had this power;² yet no devils ever durst take possession of the governor of a province, of a senator, nor even of a centurion. None but the poor were ever possessed by them.

If the devil ought to have seized hold of any particular individual, it should have been Pilate, yet he never durst approach him. Although the Christian sect was in reality established by this custom, yet it is almost every where abolished, except in states obedient to the Pope, and in some of the German cantons, where the ignorant people are unfortunately in subjection to bishops and monks.

Thus the Christians gained credit among the ignorant people during a whole century. The government let them alone, regarding them as a Jewish sect, and the Jews were tolerated. They persecuted neither Pharisees, nor Sadducees, nor the Therapeutæ, nor Essenians, nor Judaites; and they had a still greater reason to permit the Christians to creep on in their

¹ 2 Kings iv. 32.

² Matt. xii. 27.

ignorance, that of their being unknown. They were so little thought of, that neither Josephus, nor Philo, nor Plutarch, deigns to speak of them ; and if Tacitus says a few words respecting them, it is by confounding them with the Jews, and stigmatizing them in the most contemptible manner. They possessed, therefore, the greatest facility of extending their sect.

They were a little enquired after under Domitian ; some of them were punished under Trajan, and it was then that they began to unite a thousand false accounts of martyrs, to some others that were but too true.

CHAP. XV.

HOW THE CHRISTIANS CONDUCTED THEMSELVES TOWARDS THE JEWS. THEIR RIDICULOUS EXPLANATION OF THE PROPHECIES.

THE Christians could never succeed so well among the Jews as they did among the populace of the Gentiles. So long as they continued to live according to the Mosaic law, which Jesus had observed all his lifetime ; so long as they abstained from meats pretended to be impure, and did not proscribe circumcision, they were regarded only as a particular society of the Jews, such as the Sadducees, Essenians, and Therapeutæ. They said that it was wrong to put Jesus to death, that he was a holy man sent by God, and that he had risen again from the dead.

These discoveries, it is true, were punished at Jerusalem ; it is said that they cost Stephen his life, but otherwise this division produced only altercations between the rigid Jews and half Christians. They disputed ; and the Christians fancied that they had found in the Scriptures some passages that might be twisted in favour of their cause.

They pretended that the Jewish prophets had predicted Jesus Christ, and quoted Isaiah, who said to king Ahaz,¹ "Behold, a virgin (or a young woman, ALMA²) shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall hiss for the fly that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired, namely, by them beyond the river, by the king of Assyria, the head and the hair of the feet; and it shall also consume the beard."

Chap. viii. "Moreover, the Lord said unto me, Take thee a great roll, and write in it with a man's pen, concerning Maher-shalal-hash-baz. And I went unto the prophetess, and she conceived, and bare a son. Then said the Lord to me, Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz," which signifies, "Divide quickly the spoils."

"You see clearly," said the Christians, "that the whole of this evidently signifies the coming of Jesus Christ. The young woman who has a child is the Virgin Mary. 'Immanuel' and 'Divide quickly the spoils,' signify our Lord Jesus Christ. As for the razor 'that is hired to shave the hair of the king of Assyria,' that is another matter." All these explanations perfectly resemble those of Lord Peter in Dean Swift's Tale of a Tub.

¹ Isaiah vii.

² By what fraudulent impudence have the Christians maintained that ALMA always signifies a virgin? There are in the Old Testament twenty passages, where *alma* is taken for a woman, and ever for a concubine, as in Solomon's Song, chap. vi., and Jcel chap. i. Till the time of Abbé Tutheme, none of the doctors of the church knew Hebrew, except Origen, Jerome, and Ephraim, who were brought up in the country.

The Jews answered, " We do not see so clearly as you do, that ' Divide quickly the spoils,' and ' Immanuel' signify Jesus ; that Isaiah's young woman is a virgin ; nor that *alma*, which is equally expressive both of girl and young woman, signifies Mary." And they laughed in the faces of the Christians.

When the Christians said that Jesus is predicted by the patriarch Judah, who was to " bind his foal unto the vine, and wash his garments in wine,"¹ and Jesus having entered Jerusalem on an ass, then Judah is a type of Jesus. This made the Jews to laugh still more.

If they pretended that Jesus was the Shiloh who was to come before the sceptre had departed from Judah,² the Jews confounded them by saying, that, since the Babylonish captivity, the sceptre had never been in Judah, and that even during the time of Saul, the rod was not in Judah. Thus the Christians, far from being able to convert the Jews, were despised and detested by them, and are so still. They were looked upon as bastards, who, under false titles, wished to strip the heir of his possession. They then renounced the hope of converting the Jews to their cause, and addressed themselves wholly to the Gentiles.

CHAP. XVI.

OF FALSE QUOTATIONS AND PREDICTIONS IN THE GOSPELS.

To encourage the first they had to instruct previous to baptism, it was thought good to quote old prophecies, and to make new ones. In the Gospels they quoted old prophecies at random. Matthew, or he who took the name, says that Joseph " dwelt in a city called Nazareth ; that it might be fulfilled which was

¹ Gen. xlix. 11.

² Ib. 10.

spoken by the prophet, He shall be called a Nazarene." No prophet had made use of these words, Matthew wrote therefore at random.

Luke dares to say, chap. xxi., " And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars ; the sea and the waves roaring. Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth. For the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Verily, I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled." The generation passed away, and if nothing of this kind happened, it is not my fault. Paul says nearly as much about it, in his Epistle to the Thessalonians: " Then we, which are alive and remain, shall be caught up with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air."¹

Let any one here interrogate himself, whether or not he considers it possible to carry imposture and the stupidity of fanaticism to a higher pitch? When it was seen that such gross falsehoods had been asserted, the fathers of the Church did not fail to say that Luke and Paul had understood by these predictions the destruction of Jerusalem. But, I pray you, what has the destruction of Jerusalem to do with Jesus coming in the clouds, in great power and majesty?

There is, in the Gospel attributed to John, a passage which shews clearly that this book was not composed by a Jew. Jesus said, " A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another." This commandment, so far from being a new one, is enjoined in a much more forcible manner in Leviticus, " Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."²

In short, whoever will give himself the trouble of reading, with attention, the passages where the Old Testament is quoted, will find only a manifest abuse of words, and the seal of falsehood almost in every page.

¹ 1 Thess. iv. 17.

² Levit. xix. 18.

CHAP. XVII.

OF THE END OF THE WORLD, AND THE NEW JERUSALEM.

Not only have they introduced Jesus on the scene predicting the end of the world, even during his own life-time, but this was also the fanaticism of all those called apostles and disciples.

Peter Barjonas says, in the first Epistle attributed to him, "For this cause was the Gospel preached also to them that are dead; but the end of all things is at hand."¹ In his 2d Epistle, "We look for new heavens and a new earth."²

The first Epistle attributed to John says, formally, "Even now are there many anti-christs, whereby we know that it is the last time."³

The Epistle put to the account of this Thaddeus, surnamed Jude, announces the same folly: "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all."⁴

In short, it was this kind of madness which served as a foundation for the other respecting the new Jerusalem which was to descend from heaven. The Apocalypse announced this approaching adventure; all the Christians believed it. New Sibylline verses were written, in which this Jerusalem was predicted; this new city even made its appearance, and the Christians were to dwell in it for a thousand years after the conflagration of the world. It descended from heaven forty nights successively. Tertullian saw it himself.

The day will come when every honest man will say, Is it possible that men have spent their time in refuting this tale of a tub?

Behold the opinions that caused half the earth to be ravaged! Behold what has given principalities and

¹ 1 Peter iv. 6, 7. ² 2 Peter iii. 13. ³ 1 John. ii. 18. ⁴ Jude 14.

kingdoms to hypocritical priests, and which, in all Catholic countries, still precipitates simpletons into the dungeons of a cloister!

It is by means of these spider-webs that they have twisted the cords that bind us, and they have found out the secret of transforming them into chains of iron! Great God! It is for such fooleries that Europe has weltered in blood, and that Charles I. died on the scaffold! O destiny! When a parcel of half Jews wrote their dull impertinences in barns, did they perceive that they were preparing thrones for the abominable Pope Alexander VIth., and for this brave villain of a Cromwell?

CHAP. XVIII.

OF ALLEGORIES.

THOSE whom we call fathers of the church, adopted a trick singular enough, to confirm those who were preparing to be baptised, in their new belief. In the course of time, they found disciples who reasoned a little, and adopted the plan of teaching them, that all the Old Testament is only a type of the new. The piece of scarlet cloth which the prostitute Rahab hung out at her window to avert the spies of Joshua, signifies the blood of Jesus Christ shed for our sins.

Sarah, and her servant Hagar, blear-eyed Leah and beautiful Rachel, are the synagogue and the church. Moses lifting up his hands when he gave battle to the Amalekites, is evidently the sign of the cross, for we are exactly in the shape of a cross when we stretch out our arms to the right and to the left. Joseph sold by his brethren is Jesus Christ. The kisses given on the mouth of the Shulamite, &c. in Solomon's Song, are visibly the marriage of Jesus Christ with his church. The bride had then no dowry, at that time she was not well established.

The people did not know what to believe ; no dogma was yet precisely agreed upon. Jesus had written nothing. What a strange legislator must that man have been whose hand did not trace a single line ! This made it necessary to write ; they then abandon themselves to this good news ; to these gospels, to these acts of which we have already spoken, and all the Old Testament is turned into allegories of the new. It is not surprising that Catechumens, fascinated by those who wished to form a party, suffered themselves to be seduced by those fancies that are always pleasing to the people.

This plan contributed more than any thing else to the propagation of Christianity, which spread itself secretly from one end of the empire to the other, without the magistrates at that time deigning to take any notice of it.

What a ridiculous and foolish notion to make the history of a horde of beggars, a type and a prophecy of every thing that should happen in the world in all succeeding ages !

CHAP. XIX.

OF FALSIFICATIONS AND SUPPOSITITIOUS BOOKS.

THE better to enable them to seduce the uninitiated during the first centuries, they did not fail to state that the sect had been respected by the Romans, and even by the emperors themselves. It was not enough to forge a number of writings which they attributed to Jesus ; they also made Pilate write. Justin and Tertullian quote the " Acts of Pilate," and they are inserted in the Gospel of Nicodemus.

Here follow some passages of the first letter of Pilate to Tiberius, which are curious.

" It has lately happened, and I have witnessed it,

that the envy of the Jews has drawn upon them a cruel judgment. Their God having promised to send them his saint from heaven, to be their true king, and having promised that he should be the son of a virgin, the God of the Hebrews did really send him while I presided in Judea. The principal Jews denounced him to me as a magician, I believed it, ordered him to be flogged, and then abandoned him to them. They crucified him, put guards round his sepulchre, and he rose again the third day." This ancient letter is very important, as it shews us that, at that time, the Christians had not yet dared to suppose that Jesus was God. They merely say he was sent from God. If he had then been a God, Pilate, whom they cause to speak, would not have failed to say so.

In the 2d letter he says, that if he had not feared a sedition, perhaps this noble Jew would still have lived. "*Fortasse vir ille nobilis viveret.*" They likewise forged a more detailed account which was attributed to Pilate.

Eusebius of Cæsarea, book vii. of his Ecclesiastical History, assures us, that the woman troubled with the flux, who was cured by Jesus Christ, was a citizeness of Cæsarea; he has seen her statue at the foot of that of Jesus. Round the base there are herbs which cure all kinds of diseases.

They likewise gave out a pretended edict of Tiberius, to rank Jesus among the gods. They invented letters from Paul to Seneca, and from Seneca to Paul. Emperors, philosophers, and apostles were all put to contribution; it was an uninterrupted course of frauds; some of them merely fanatical, the others political.

A fanatical lie, for example, is that of writing the Revelation and attributing it to John, which is only an absurdity; a political lie is that of writing the book of Constitutions, and attributing it to the apostles.

All these supposititious books, all these falsehoods, which have been denominated pious, were put only into the hands of the faithful. It was an enormous

offence to communicate them to the Romans, who had scarcely any knowledge of them during the space of two hundred years ; thus the flock increased daily.

CHAP. XX.

OF THE PRINCIPAL IMPOSITIONS OF THE FIRST CHRISTIANS.

ONE of the oldest impositions of these new demons, was the " Testament of the twelve Patriarchs," and we still have entire the Greek translation of it by John, surnamed St. Chrysostom.

This ancient book, which was written in the first century of our æra, is visibly the production of a Christian, because it makes Levi say in the 8th article of his Testament, " The third shall have a new name, because he shall be a king of Judah." This signifies Jesus Christ, who has never been designated but by such like impostures.

They invented the Testaments of Moses, Enoch, and Joseph, their ascension or assumption into heaven, that of Moses, Abraham, Elda, Moda, Elias, Sophonia, Zachariah, and Habakkuk. At the same time they forged the famous book of Enoch, which is the only foundation for all the mystery of Christianity, since it is in this book alone that we find the history of the rebellious angels who had sinned. It is certain, that the writings attributed to the apostles were not composed till after the fable of Enoch, which was written in Greek by some Christian of Alexandria. Jude, in his Epistle, quotes this Enoch more than once ;¹ he reports his own words, and is so destitute of common sense, as to assert that Enoch, who was the seventh man after Adam, had written prophecies.

Here, then, we have two vile impositions well attested ; that of the Christian who invented the book

¹ Jude 14.

of Enoch, and that of the Christian who invented the Epistle of Jude, in which the words of Enoch are related. There was never a more stupid falsehood.

It is very useless to enquire who was the principal author of these frauds, which insensibly gained credit, but there is some probability that it was Hegesippus, whose fables had a great run, and who was quoted by Tertullian, and afterwards copied by Eusebius.

The supposititious letter of Jesus Christ to a pretended king of the city of Edessa, which had not then a king, and the journey of Thaddeus (or Jude) to this king, were four hundred years in vogue among the first Christians.

Whoever wrote a gospel, or undertook to teach his little rising flock, imputed to Jesus discourses and actions which are not mentioned in our four Gospels. It is thus that in the 20th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, Paul quotes these words of Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."¹ These words are not to be found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, nor John.

The travels of Peter, the revelation of Peter, the acts of Paul and of Thecle, the letters from Paul to Seneca, and from Seneca to Paul, the acts of Pilate and the letters of Pilate, are sufficiently known among the learned, and it is useless to rummage among these archives of falsehood and absurdity.

They carried their nonsense to such a pitch, as to write the history of Claudia Procula, who was Pilate's wife.

¹ Acts xx. 35.

CONCLUSION.

I CONCLUDE, that every sensible man, every honest man, ought to hold Christianity in abhorrence. "The great name of Theist, which we can never sufficiently revere,"¹ is the only name we ought to adopt.

The only gospel we should read is the grand book of nature, written with God's own hand, and stamped with his own seal. The only religion we ought to profess is, "to adore God, and act like honest men." It would be as impossible for this simple and eternal religion to produce evil, as it would be impossible for Christian fanaticism not to produce it.

Natural religion can never be made to say, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword."² Yet this is the first confession they put into the mouth of a Jew whom they call Christ.

Men are very blind and wretched to prefer an absurd and sanguinary sect, maintained by hangmen and surrounded by funeral piles; a sect which could find no admirers but among those to whom it communicated wealth and power, a particular sect received only in a small portion of the globe, in preference to a simple and universal religion, which even, by the confession of Christians, was the religion of the human race during the ages of Seth, Enoch, and Noah. If the religion of the first patriarchs were true, certainly the religion of Jesus must be false.

Sovereigns have submitted themselves to this sect, thinking they would be more respected by their own subjects, by loading themselves with the yoke which

¹ Shaftesbury.

² Matt. x. 34.

was imposed upon the people. They did not perceive that they made themselves the first slaves of the priests, and in one half of Europe they have not yet been enabled to render themselves independent. And pray what king, what magistrate, what father of a family, would not rather be the master of his own house, than be the slave of a priest?

What! The innumerable number of citizens that have been injured, excommunicated, reduced to beggary, killed, and their bodies cast on the high way; the number of princes dethroned and assassinated, has not yet opened men's eyes! And when we do open them, we perceive that this fatal idol is not yet demolished!

But what shall we substitute in its place, say you! What? A ferocious animal has sucked the blood of my relatives. I tell you to rid yourselves of this beast, and you ask me what you shall put in its place! Is it you that put this question to me? Then you are a hundred times more odious than the pagan pontiffs, who permitted themselves to enjoy tranquillity among their ceremonies and sacrifices, who did not attempt to enslave the mind by dogmas, who never disputed the powers of the magistrates, and who introduced no discord among mankind. You have the face to ask what you must substitute in the place of your fables? I answer you, "God, truth, virtue, laws, rewards, and punishments." Preach probity, and do not preach dogmas; be the priests of God, and not the priests of a man.

After having, in the presence of God, weighed Christianity in the balance of truth, we must likewise weigh it in the balance of policy. It would be both dangerous and irrational to give all at once such a blow to Christianity as was given to Popery.

I am of opinion, that in our own island, the hierarchy ought to be suffered to exist as by Act of Parliament established, always keeping it in subjection to the civil power, and preventing it from doing mischief.

It is doubtless desirable, that the idol were demolished, and that we might be permitted to offer God a more simple adoration, but the people are not yet ready for the change. It will be sufficient at the present time for our church to be kept within proper bounds. As the laymen become more enlightened, less mischief will be experienced from the priesthood. Let us endeavour to enlighten the clergy themselves, to make them blush for their errors, and to persuade them, by degrees, to become useful citizens

THE END.

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THE

Miraculous Conception:

OR,

THE DIVINITY OF JESUS CHRIST

CONSIDERED AS

The Foundation

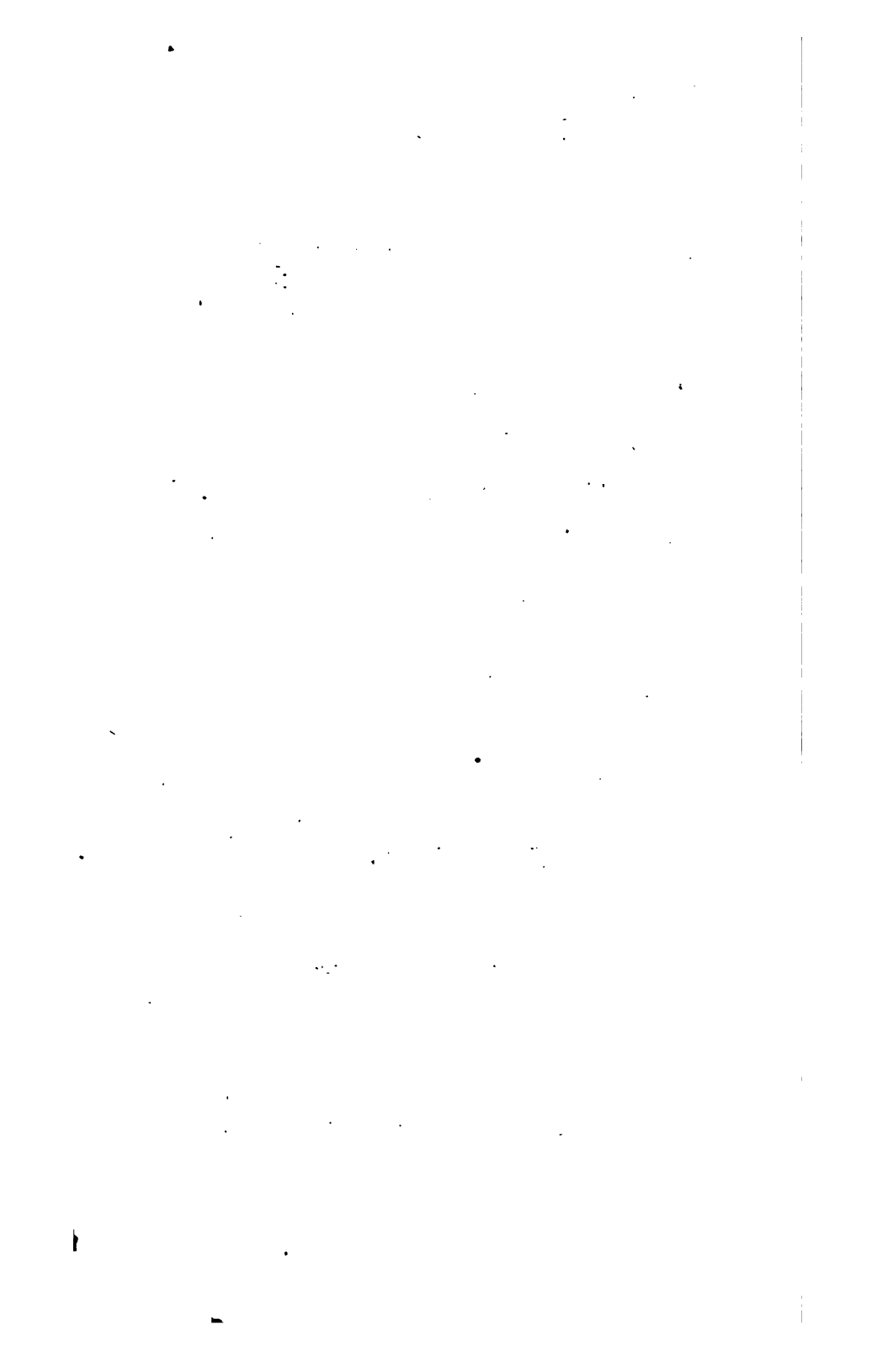
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THE
Miraculous Conception,

&c.

THERE are two accounts of the miraculous conception, one in the gospel according to St. Matthew, the other in the gospel according to St. Luke. In both these accounts there are several collateral circumstances which are here printed from the approved version, but the examination is intended to be confined as closely as possible to those parts only which relate to the miraculous conception, and, consequently, to the supposed divinity of Jesus Christ. That the Christian reader may see nakedly, and without disguise, the grounds of his faith.

The story in St. Matthew is as follows :—

CHAP. I.

“ 18. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise : *when as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.*

“ 19. *Then Joseph her husband being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.*

“ 20. *But while he thought on these things, behold the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, ‘ Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife : for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.*

“ 21. ‘ And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus : for he shall save his people from their sins.’

" 22. Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

" 23. Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted, is God with us.

" 24. *Then Joseph being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife.*

" 25. And knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son. And he called his name Jesus."

This is all St. Matthew says on the subject.

St. Luke's account is more circumstantial, it is as follows :—

CHAP. I.

" 5. There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

" 6. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

" 7. And they had no child, because that Elizabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.

" 8. And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course,

" 9. According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

" 10. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.

" 11. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

" 12. And when Zacharias saw him he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

" 13. But the angel said unto him, ' Fear not, Zacharias; for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Eliza-

beth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.

“ 14. ‘ And thou shalt have joy and gladness ; and many shall rejoice at his birth.

“ 15. ‘ For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink ; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb.

“ 16. ‘ And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.

“ 17. ‘ And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just ; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.’

“ 18. And Zacharias said unto the angel, ‘ Whereby shall I know this ? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.’

“ 19. And the angel answering said unto him, ‘ I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God ; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.

“ 20. ‘ And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.’

“ 21. And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple.

“ 22. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them ; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple : for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.

“ 23. And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.

“ 24. And after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying,

“ 25. ‘ Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.’

" 26. *And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,*

" 27. *To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.*

" 28. *And the angel came in unto her, and said, 'Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.'*

" 29. *And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.*

" 30. *And the angel said unto her, 'Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.'*

" 31. *'And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus.'*

" 32. *'He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:*

" 33. *'And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.'*

" 34. *Then said Mary unto the angel, 'How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?'*

" 35. *And the angel answered and said unto her, 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.'*

" 36. *'And, behold, thy cousin Elizabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.'*

" 37. *'For with God nothing shall be impossible.'*

" 38. *And Mary said, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.' And the angel departed from her.*

" 39. *And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill-country with haste, into a city of Juda;*

" 40. *And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elizabeth.*

" 41. *And it came to pass, that, when Elizabeth*

heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost.

" 42. And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, 'Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.'

" 43. 'And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

" 44. 'For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.'

" 45. 'And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord,'

" 46. *And Mary said, 'My soul doth magnify the Lord,*

" 47. *'And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.*

" 48. 'For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.'

" 49. 'For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.'

" 50. 'And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.'

" 51. 'He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.'

" 52. 'He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.'

" 53. 'He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.'

" 54. 'He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy.'

" 55. 'As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.'

" 56. *And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.*

The whole of the foregoing matter, as well that

taken from Matthew as that from Luke, is rejected by the Unitarians as spurious. This sect, which is every day increasing, contains, and has long contained, many very learned men; and these men have for the use of the sect made a new translation of the Testament, which is published under the title of "THE NEW TESTAMENT, IN AN IMPROVED VERSION," &c.

In a long note, appended to the 16th verse of the 1st chapter of St. Matthew, reasons are given for rejecting the story of the miraculous conception. Among other things it observes, "The account of the miraculous conception of Jesus was probably the fiction of some early Gentile convert, who hoped, by elevating the founder, to abate the popular prejudices against the sect. See upon this subject, Dr. Priestley's History of Early Opinions, Vol. IV. Book iii. c. 29; Pope on the Miraculous Conception; Dr. Williams's Free Enquiry; Dr. Bell's Arguments for the Authenticity of the Narratives of Matthew and Luke, and Dr. Williams's Remarks; Dr. Campbell's and Dr. Newcombe's Notes upon the Text; Mr. Evanson's Dissonance, chap. i. sect. 3. chap. iii. sect. 2.; Jones's Developement of Events, Vol. I. p. 365," &c.

In a note to the 1st chapter of Luke, the Improved Version has six articles, containing reasons for rejecting both that and the succeeding chapter. The six articles are summed up by the following observation: "And there are many other circumstances in the story which wear an improbable and fabulous aspect."

"It has," they continue, "been objected, that so large and gross an interpolation could not have escaped detection, and would never have been so early and so generally received. In reply to this objection it is observed, that the interpolation was not admitted into the Hebrew¹ copies of Matthew's Gospel, nor into Marcion's² copies of Luke. That it is notorious that

¹ The language in which Matthew is supposed to have written.

² Marcion was the leader of a sect in the second century.

forged writings, under the names of the apostles, were in circulation almost from the apostolic age. See 2 Thessalonians, chap. ii. ver. 2. That the orthodox charge the heretics with corrupting the text; and that the heretics recriminate upon the orthodox. Also, that it was much easier to introduce interpolation when copies were few and scarce, than since they have been multiplied by means of the press. And, finally, that the interpolation in question would, to the generality of Christians, be extremely gratifying, as it would lessen the odium attached to Christianity from its founder being a crucified Jew, and would elevate him to the dignity of the heroes and demi-gods of the heathen mythology."

The Unitarians, reject all that is related of the birth of Christ, as spurious and interpolated, and of course consider him as the son of Joseph and Mary, begotten in the ordinary way; and they give references to many scholars and inquisitive men, in whose works the curious reader will find a number of learned arguments against the stories of Matthew and Luke being received, and to these he is referred. What follows is a short examination of the two stories on the principles of what is usually called common sense, in the way in which an ordinary man would investigate a tale in which he was interested in knowing the truth.

We will begin with Matthew, because he is admitted to have been the oldest writer.

Ver. 18. "Before they came together." It was necessary to premise this, because their "coming together" was in no way disreputable according to the custom of the Jews of that time. It was usual, when both the parties were of mature age, for them to come together as soon as they were espoused; if the woman became great with child, they were then married, if otherwise, the espousement continued for a year, when the parties were usually married; but it sometimes hap-

pened that they separated by consent. Not having children being considered a curse.

Ver. 19. "Joseph was minded to put her away *privily*." In the former verse it is said, "she was found with child of the Holy Ghost;" here, it seems, it was not suspected to be "of the Holy Ghost," but by a man, and that too as a fraud upon Joseph, who was minded in consequence to put her away. It follows, also, that Mary was unconscious that it was "of the Holy Ghost" she was breeding, or we must suppose she would not have failed to have told Joseph of so very important a circumstance; it is, however, abundantly plain, she told him nothing about it. "She was found with child." How found? By her own confession. No such thing; had that been the case, it would certainly have been mentioned; and the angel which, in the next verse, came on purpose to announce it, would, instead of announcing it, have come only to have confirmed her account of her being with child, without having known man, and to say how it happened. But, no; the angel comes not for any such purpose, but to prevent her being put away when it had been discovered that she was breeding. By what was she found to be with child. By her appearance? No; in that case, "putting her away *privily*" would have been absurd? By her friends? No; "putting her away *privily*" would in that case have been equally absurd. It could then have been known to no one but her husband Joseph, who finding himself imposed upon, was willing to hide his shame by getting rid of her in the quietest way he could. But all this happened "before they came together;" this assertion was made for the open-mouthed, wide-throated, credulous, ignorant people, to whom this Gospel was addressed, and for their successors, "who strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel."

If they had "not come together," all Joseph would

have had to do would have been to send her home again to her parents; he would have had no occasion to cogitate on the means of getting rid of her; he would have told her relations, "My bargain was for sound ware, and I cannot take this 'cracked pitcher,'" and there the matter would have ended. But it was by their coming together that Joseph found out she was with child; how long they had cohabited does not appear, but it must have been some time, according to the easy, familiar style of the narrative: "When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together she was found with child." Their having been together, and her being with child, were indeed the only reasons why he could not send her home again, as barrenness was a curse, so fruitfulness was a blessing, and had Joseph sent her home he would have been reminded that he had possessed the person of his espoused, and was in a fair way to be blessed. According to the Jewish law and custom, he had no cause for complaint, and could have received no redress; therefore he "thought on these things, and was minded to put her away privily."

So far this story is told in a bungling manner, pompously introduced by a falsehood, that "she was found with child of the Holy Ghost."

Ver. 20. "But while he thought of these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.'" In verse 18, "she was found to be with child of the Holy Ghost," and then, and not till then, Joseph was going to put her away; plain enough it is, if the words have any meaning, that "she was found with child," but not "of the Holy Ghost;" if it had been so, it could not have been said, "Then Joseph was minded to put her away," neither would it have been necessary for "the angel of the Lord" to pester him in his sleep, as he is said to have done.

Cavillers may talk themselves blind, learned doctors may preach themselves hoarse, commentators may write "so many books, that the world would not contain them," they will never be able to make any thing more of this story than that a poor, ignorant, credulous man, dreamed in his sleep that an angel had been talking nonsense to him; this folly might have passed, as no doubt it did pass for reason, some centuries ago, when almost every body had faith in dreams, but it is an ill compliment to the intelligence of the present generation to expect it should be equally besotted.

Joseph dreamed that he saw an angel, that the angel told him his wife was with child by God himself, (the Holy Ghost being God), and ver. 24, "Then Joseph being raised from his sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took unto him his wife." But did Joseph dream? Perhaps he did; but whether he did or did not, clear enough it is that he, and he alone, could relate that he had dreamed; whether or not he did make such a relation we are not told, but we are left to infer that he did, because somebody, nobody knows who, has written that he did say he had dreamed. But if he had dreamed, and had personally related his dream to every one of us, would that be any reason for our believing that God had got his wife with child, and that an angel had been sent to tell him so? Talk of blasphemy; in what can this relation be paralleled as blasphemous, except indeed by the grossest credulity? A poor, ignorant man relates a dream, and all the world are called upon not only to believe his relation of that dream, absurd, abominable, and ridiculous as it is, but to place their everlasting happiness upon the absurd relation, to inculcate a belief so it into their children, to waste their substance in paying people to preach it, and to persecute to death those whose minds cannot receive the monstrous doctrine as undoubted truth. Moral evidence there is none, there can be none;—there is nothing in the

story which can be compared and contrasted ; there is nothing out of it which can elucidate it ; it is nothing more than a pretended relation of a credulous man—*That he, being a sleep, had dreamed a dream.*

According to the account given by St. Luke, not one word of all this story is true.

ST. LUKE. Chap. I.—Here the story is altogether, from the beginning to the end, a different one from that told by Matthew. Here there is no account

1. Of Mary being found with child.
2. Of Joseph's intention to put her away.
3. Of Joseph's dreaming.
4. Of the angel appearing to him.
5. Of his changing his mind, and resolving to keep her.

It should be observed, that these five items include the whole account in Matthew. So, in Luke, not one of the circumstances related are told by Matthew. In Matthew, Joseph is made the important personage, while poor Mary seems to have been ignorant of all that was passing ; in Luke she is made the important personage, and poor Joseph is now as ignorant as Mary was according to the former relation.

Luke's account is indeed very circumstantial, he says it was the angel Gabriel who visited Mary, but although he relates the very words which passed between them, it does not appear that Mary knew she was conversing with an angel ; he did not announce himself as an angel, nor is there one word in the dialogue between them which can fairly be said to indicate any such understanding on the part of Mary: she does not appear to have been at all surprised at the visit, private and abrupt as it was. "*She was troubled at his saying,*" not at his presence, "*and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be ;*" at this salutation she might, to be sure, be somewhat confounded, although she immediately afterwards submitted herself so humbly to her guest. "*All these things she kept in her heart,*" for it does not appear

that she communicated any of them to her husband; to him she never opened her lips on the subject; no angel visited him, sleeping or waking, to tell him of it; nothing is said about his "*knowing her not till she had brought forth her first-born*;" they lived together in the ordinary way of poor people, as man and wife, until she was brought to bed in a stable, Joseph all the time considering the child as his.

Luke's story, stripped of its verbiage, is this:—The angel Gabriel was sent by God to Mary, who was espoused to Joseph. The angel addresses her very familiarly—she becomes alarmed, and the angel tells her she shall "conceive in her womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus." Mary, in her simplicity, asks how that can be, "seeing I know not a man." The angel replies,—“The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee.” And Mary says, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word.” Mary then went to her cousin Elizabeth, who lived at a distance “in the hill-country, where she staid about three months,” and then she came home again. Afterwards Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem to be taxed, (enrolled); here Mary is delivered in a stable, there being no room in the inn.

A Mr. Le Clerc, a very learned, that is, a very bookish man, made what he called a harmony of the Evangelists; he puts the relation of Luke first, and supposes all that he relates, happened to Mary, before Joseph and she got together: and that she concealed from him all that had passed between her and the angel Gabriel, and between her and Elizabeth; and that Joseph being left in utter ignorance of all that had passed, resolved to put her away. To prevent this, says the learned Doctor, an angel appeared to him in a dream (what does appearing in a dream mean, simply in his imagination) and told him the story as related by Matthew. The learned Doctor says: “Joseph being awaked from his dream, perceived it had been sent by

God, as well because Mary, upon his enquiry, related to him what had happened to her just after the same manner as the angel had told him in his sleep."

To what miserable shifts is folly driven to support superstition; what miserable pretexts does roguery have recourse to, to propagate and uphold imposition! Not one word is there to warrant this pretended conference with Mary, which the learned Doctor has so circumstantially related. That Joseph was ignorant of the intercourse Mary had had with the angel, could not be concealed from the reader, who believed Matthew's relation, according to which Mary had said nothing to Joseph of the communication and commerce she had had with the angel, neither is there the least reason from that account to suppose that Matthew knew any thing of the decently-told story of Elizabeth, or of Mary's going and remaining three months with her; but, according to Luke, she hurried off in her exultation of being with child, and there they communed together in a state of the highest enthusiasm. Elizabeth, being filled with the Holy Ghost, and the babe leaping for joy in her womb, spake out in a loud voice,—and Mary followed in the same manner, and in the same strain. But notwithstanding this, notwithstanding the exultation between the women, Joseph was not to be let into the secret; all the rapturous feelings of Mary were now subdued; she not only suppressed her joy which seemed unbounded, but she kept the whole matter a profound secret, even at a risk of being turned out of doors as a strumpet, and an angel is obliged to be sent from God to Joseph in a dream, to prevent the catastrophe; the deception is approved by God, who sends the "angel from heaven" to reconcile Joseph to his wife's perfidy.

According to Matthew, a certain man had a dream. According to Luke, an angel called privately on a young woman, who, in consequence of the visit, was with child. And this is all there is to establish the divinity of Jesus Christ.

It cannot be called evidence, for by whom it was given, whether by the man himself, or the woman herself, nobody knows; to whom it was given, if it was given, nobody knows; when it was given, nobody knows; where it was given, nobody knows; and the learned are even disputing to this very time about the language in which the stories were originally written, and by whom they were written. And yet not literally to believe either or both of these worse than "old wives' tales," is to subject a man to persecution; not to affect to believe that which, when stripped of the absurd reverence which has been cast round it, no man ever did or ever can believe, is to be imputed to him as a reproach of so horrible a nature, that thousands, who treat it as it deserves in their own minds, dare not avow their disbelief; not to commit the immoral act of self-delusion and debasement is imputed as a crime, and men are shunned because they are moral.

The sanctity thrown around this sad nonsense; the cry of blasphemy which has been raised against any one who ventured to examine it, the horror felt by fanatics, which vented itself in persecutions the most diversified, deterred people from trusting to reason, and made them even forget that it was by reason alone they are ever able to choose one religion in preference to another. Every religious sect allows, that you may use your reason to distinguish between what they hold out to you, and what you yourself believe; you may, and you ought, they tell you, to exercise your reason so far as to give their doctrines the preference; and having thus exercised your reason, and having by its aid abandoned your former notions, and adopted theirs; having become "a child of grace," and turned to the right way, there shall be "more joy in heaven at your conversion than over ninety and nine just persons, who" having always belonged to the sect, "needed no conversion." All sects proclaim this joy, at the same moment, as each makes converts from the others; with all of them reason to choose your faith is the great

good, but having exercised it so far, there you must stop, reason must be instantly extinguished; on no account must you trust to such a "*blind guide*;" reason, which but just before was all but omnipotent, is now "fallible"—"*poor fallible reason*," all is now "*faith*;" examine any one of their dogmas, you are a "backslider;" doubt any one of their absurd relations, you are a "blasphemer;" and thus it is that ignorance and persecution brutalizes and degrades mankind. Had the stories of Joseph and Mary been preached to us from the sacred books of the Persians, how would every good Christian have been scandalized! "What," he would have exclaimed, "what horrid blasphemy! first to pretend that God himself (the Holy Ghost being God) had commerce with a woman, by which she became with child, and who all the time she was breeding lived with a man, lived with him, too, by command of 'an angel sent from God,' lived with him as his wife in such a way that no one seems to have suspected the child was not his own, and after the birth of God, (God the Son being God) in the ordinary way of all mankind, and still living with him, and having other children by him.¹ First God has her, then Joseph has her. These are abominable stories, indeed. Call out blasphemy at yourselves, ye fanatical persecutors of other men's opinions. Shame, pity, contempt, are the passions those terrible tales excite for you, compassion for those who are so unfortunate as to become your victims."

Thanks, however, are due to the intelligence of the age which could endure this monstrous perversion of the human understanding no longer, which has abolished the LAW that made it criminal to deny "that

¹ Matt. chap. xiii. ver. 55, 56. "Is not this the son of the carpenter? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas, and are not all his sisters with us?"

Jesus Christ is God," and left us at liberty freely to express our opinions on this absurd dogma.¹

¹ By stat. 9 and 10 William III. c. 32. "Any person or persons, having been educated in or having at any time made profession of the Christian religion within this realm, shall by writing, printing, teaching, or advised speaking, deny any one of the persons in the Holy Trinity to be God, or shall assert or maintain there are more Gods than one," shall be liable to certain penalties.

By stat. 53 George III. c. 160. it is enacted, that the Act passed in the 9 and 10 William III. "so far as the same relates to persons denying as therein-mentioned, respecting the Holy Trinity, be, and the same are hereby repealed."

THE END.

LETTERS TO EUGENIA,

ON THE

ABSURD, CONTRADICTORY, AND DEMORALIZING

Dogmas and Mysteries

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

NOW FIRST TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF FRERET,

BUT SUPPOSED TO BE WRITTEN BY

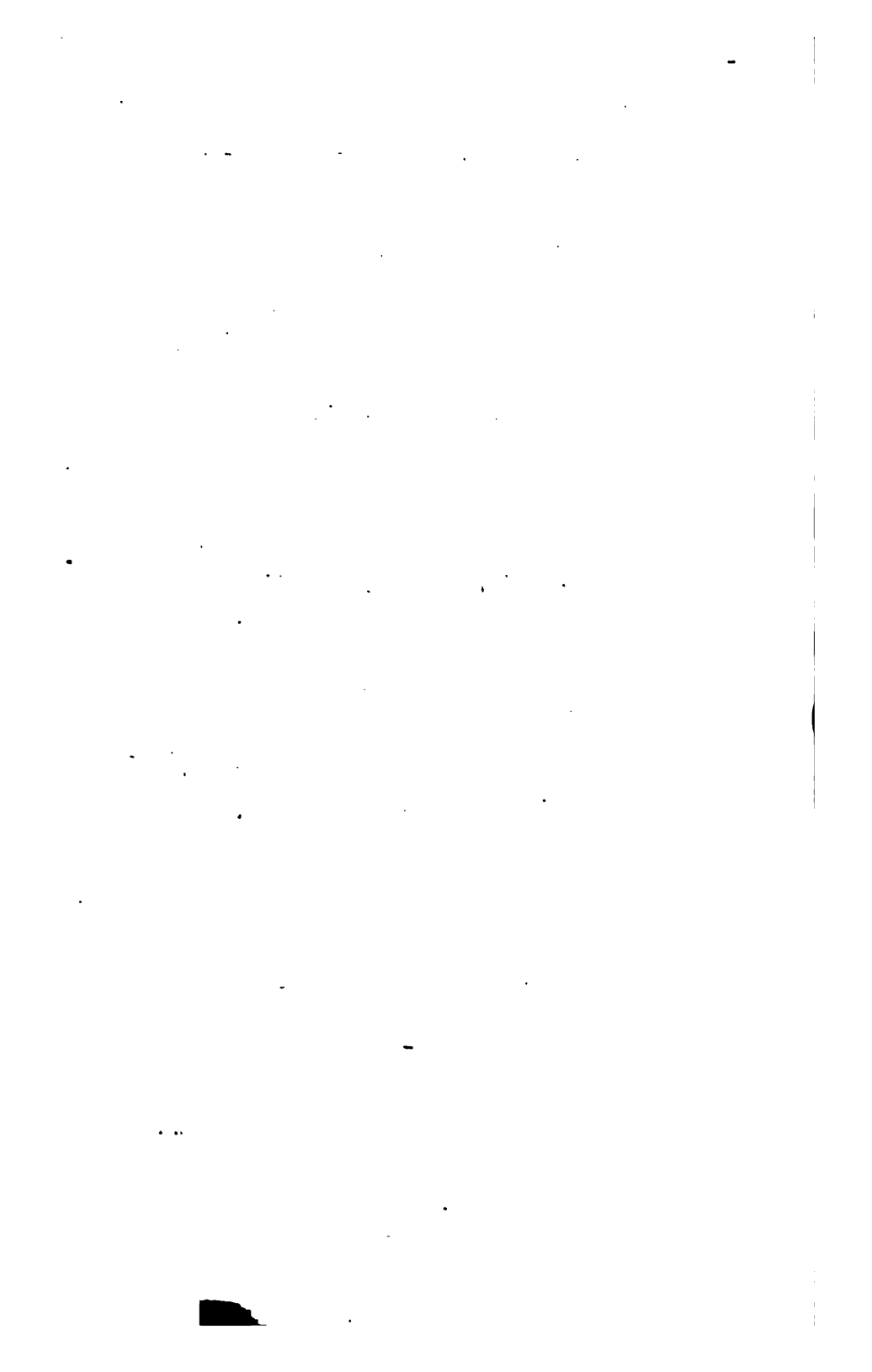
BARON HOLBACH,

AUTHOR OF THE SYSTEM OF NATURE, CHRISTIANITY UNVEILED, COMMON
SENSE, UNIVERSAL MORALITY, NATURAL MORALITY, &c.

London:

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LETTERS TO EUGENIA,

&c.

LETTER I.

HAD not your letter, Madam, contained so strong a confirmation of the troubles that agitate you, I should nevertheless have easily recognized the work of superstition. That alone is capable of alarming honest minds, without calming the passions of the corrupt, and suffices for ever to annihilate repose from the heart, of which it once obtains the possession.

Yes, Madam, I have long known the melancholy effects of religious prejudices, and I now intend to speak to you with freedom respecting them. Perhaps at first view my ideas may appear strange, but on a closer examination they will cease to shock you. In a mind like yours, reason, sincerity, and truth will always possess their rights.

Your goodness, candour, and sincerity, prevent you from suspecting in others any thing like fraud or malignity. The mildness of your disposition prevents you from contradicting notions that would appear to you revolting, if you deigned to examine them; but you would rather refer to the judgment of others, and subscribe to their ideas, than consult your own reason and understanding. The vivacity of your imagination makes you seize with eagerness the dark pictures presented to you; interested men avail themselves of your sensibility in order to alarm you; they see you shudder at the terrible names of *death, judgment, hell, punishment, and eternity*; they strike you with awe at the

name of an inflexible *Judge*, whose decrees are unchangeable. You imagine you see around you demons that are made the ministers of vengeance on his feeble creatures. Thus is your mind in continual alarm; each instant you are afraid of unknowingly offending a capricious God, who is always threatening and revengeful. If you be consistent in your principles, every moment of a life which would have been remarkable only for its contentment and peace, will soon be infected with inquietudes, scruples, and panic terrors, from which a mind like yours ought for ever to have been exempted. The agitation into which these fatal ideas have thrown you, suspends the use of your faculties; your reason is drawn aside by a wandering imagination; you fall into perplexity, lowness of spirits, and self-distrust, and you thus become the dupe of men, who by addressing themselves to our imagination and deafening our reason, have long since succeeded in subjugating the universe, and in persuading rational beings that their reason is either useless or dangerous.

Such, Madam, is the constant language of the apostles of superstition, whose project has been, and always will be, to annihilate human reason, in order that their authority over mankind may be exercised with impunity.

Every where have the perfidious ministers of revealed religion been either the avowed or the secret enemies of reason, because they always found reason in opposition to their views. They have every where decried it, fearing it would destroy their empire, by discovering their plots and the futility of their fables. They have every where endeavoured to erect on its ruins the empire of fanaticism and imagination. To make sure of success, they have continually alarmed mankind by hideous representations; they have astonished and seduced them by wonders and mysteries; they have embarrassed them by enigmas and uncertainties; overloaded them with duties and ceremonies, and filled their minds with scruples and superstitious fears.

We have only to open our eyes to perceive the disgraceful means made use of by political priestcraft to stifle the aspiring reason of man. In his infancy he is taught to respect tales that are ridiculous, impertinent, contradictory, and wicked; he is then familiarized by degrees with inconceivable mysteries, which are announced to him as sacred truths.

You have no occasion to blush, Madam, for a weakness which you possess in common with every one around you, and from which the greatest men are not always exempt. Let your courage, then, be re-animated, and dare to examine with coolness the phantoms that alarm you. In a case so interesting to your peace, consult this enlightened reason which places you as much above the vulgar, as it places the human species above all other animals. Leave inquietude and remorse to those profligate women, who feel self-reproach, or who have crimes to expiate. Leave superstition to those ignorant females, whose narrow minds are incapable of reflection.

Do not tell me, Madam, that your understanding is too feeble to sound the depths of theology. Do not tell me in the language of our priests that religious truths are mysteries which we must adopt in silent adoration, without being able to understand them. By speaking in this way, do you not see that they prescribe and condemn this religion to which they pretend to subject you? Whatever is supernatural was not intended for man to know, and whatever is out of the reach of his knowledge ought not to occupy his attention.

To say that religion is superior to reason is an acknowledgement that it was not intended for rational beings, and a confession that our Doctors know nothing about the wonders with which they daily entertain us.

If the truths of religion be as they assure us, necessary to all men, they ought to be clear and intelligible to all men. If the dogmas of this religion were as important as we are given to understand they are, they

ought not only to be suited to the capacities of the doctors who preach them, but to all those who hearken to their discourses. Is it not very wonderful that those whose profession it is to make themselves masters of the religion which they are to teach to others, acknowledge that its dogmas are above their own understanding, and are yet so obstinate as to inculcate to the people, what by their own confession they cannot comprehend?

Should we have much confidence in a physician, who after declaring that he did not understand his profession, should nevertheless boast of the excellence of his remedies? This however is daily performed by our spiritual quacks. By a strange fatuity, the most sensible people consent to be the dupes of those empiricks, who are perpetually forced to acknowledge their profound ignorance.

But if the mysteries of religion are incomprehensible to those who teach them; if among those who profess it, none can be found who knows precisely either what he believes or can give any account of the motives of his belief and conduct, this is not the case with respect to the difficulties which we oppose to this religion. These are within the reach of all, and are so simple as to be capable of convincing every man who renounces the prejudices of childhood, and deigns to consult that common sense which nature has bestowed on each individual of the human race.

If you consult our doctors they will not fail to display the antiquity of their doctrine, which has always upheld itself in spite of the continual attacks of heretics, wicked men and infidels, and in spite of pagan persecution. You have too good an understanding not to perceive that the antiquity of an opinion proves nothing in its favour. If antiquity were a proof of truth, Christianity would be forced to give way to Judaism, which for the same reason must yield to the religion of the Egyptians and Chaldeans, that is to say, to idolatry which was long anterior to Moses. It was

believed for thousands of years that the sun turned round the earth, which remained stationary ; and yet it is not the less true that the sun is fixed, and that the earth turns round the sun.

You are not calculated to be the dupe of names and authorities. You will be astounded with the multiplied testimony of many illustrious and learned men, who have not only admitted the Christian religion, but have been its most zealous defenders. You will be told of holy doctors, great philosophers, powerful reasoners, fathers of the church, and learned interpreters, who have successively supported this religious system. I shall not in this place contest their understandings which are nevertheless frequently defective ; I shall content myself with saying that in religious matters the greatest genuises are frequently less clear sighted than the people themselves ; that they have not examined the opinions they taught, either because they regarded them as sacred, or because they had never traced the origin of their principles, which they would have found ruinous, after an unprejudiced consideration ; or in short, because they saw themselves interested in the defence of a cause to which their own fortune was attached. Thus is their testimony exceptionable, and their authority of no great weight.

With respect to interpreters and commentators, who have painfully laboured during so many ages to elucidate the divine laws ; to explain the sacred writings of the Christians, and to fix the dogmas of faith, even their labours ought to make us suspect a religion founded on those books, and teaching those dogmas. They prove to us that works said to emanate from the Supreme Being, are obscure, unintelligible, and stand in need of human assistance to be understood by those to whom the Deity wished to discover his will. The laws of a wise God ought to be simple and clear ; none but defective laws stand in need of interpretation.

It is not then to those interpreters to whom you must apply. It is to yourself ; it is your own reason

that you must consult. Your own happiness and welfare are at stake, and these objects are of too serious a nature for you to entrust to others the decision respecting them. If religion be a matter as important as it is asserted to be, it undoubtedly merits the greatest attention. If this religion must have an influence on the happiness of men in this world, and the next, there is no affair of more lively interest, nor which consequently demands a more mature examination. Can any thing then be more strange than the conduct adopted by the greater part of mankind? Though perfectly convinced of the necessity of religion, and of its importance, yet never do they give themselves the trouble to examine it; they observe it from custom and habit; they never account to themselves for its dogmas; they revere it, they submit to it, and groan under its burthen, without asking themselves why they do so. In short, they have recourse to others to examine for them, and those in whose judgment they put such blind trust, are precisely the persons whose decisions they ought to regard with suspicion. Priests have the right to judge exclusively, and without any appeal, the merits of a system evidently invented for their own emolument. But what do these priests say to us? Visibly interested in maintaining received opinions, they represent them to us as necessary to the public, as interesting and consoling to each of us, as intimately connected with morality, as indispensable to society; in a word, as being of the very first importance. After having thus prejudiced us in their favour, they immediately forbid us to examine matters so important to be known. What are you to think of such conduct? You must conclude that they wish to deceive you; that they fear examination only because their religion cannot withstand it, and that they are afraid of reason, which might unveil the wicked projects of the priesthood to enslave the human race.

Thus Madam, I cannot too often repeat it, examine

for yourself, make use of your own understanding, seek truth in the sincerity of your heart, silence prejudice, and be on your guard against habitual ceremonies. Bid defiance to imagination, and then in sincerity with yourself you will weigh with a sure hand the opinions of religion.

From whatever source they spring, you will acquiesce only in what is convincing to your own reason, satisfactory to your understanding, conformable to sound morality, and approved of by a virtuous mind. You will reject with disdain, what is contradictory to reason; you will cast from you with dread, such notions as are criminal and injurious to morality, and which religion strives to impose upon us as virtues that are supernatural and divine.

Wise and amiable Eugenia! Rigorously examine the ideas which at your own request I intend to lay before you. Do not suffer your confidence in me, nor your prejudice for my weak understanding, to blind you with respect to my opinions. I submit them to your judgment; discuss them, combat them, and do not yield, till you think you have discovered the truth.

My sentiments are not offered as so many oracles, nor are they like theological opinions, against which we are not permitted to make any appeal. If I have told the truth, adopt my ideas; if I be deceived, point out my errors; I am ready to acknowledge them, and to sign my own condemnation.

I shall esteem myself happy if my reflections contribute to restore to you that tranquillity of mind, which is so necessary to enable us to judge of things rationally, and without which there can be no happiness.

I shall enter into particulars in my second Letter, and shall go back to the foundation. I flatter myself I shall prove to you, in the course of this correspondence, that the objects which theology endeavours to perplex and surround with darkness, in order to render them more sacred and respectable, are not only susceptible

of being understood by you, but may even be fully comprehended by any one who enjoys the most ordinary share of common sense.

Should my freedom, Madam, appear too abrupt, you must consider that you are the cause of it. It was necessary to speak plainly. I thought myself obliged to oppose a violent and prompt remedy to the malady that had attacked you. Besides, I dare to hope, that in a short time you will thank me, for having shewn you the truth in all its brightness; and that you will pardon me for having dispelled the incommodious phantoms that infested your mind. My efforts for your tranquillity will prove to you at least, the interest I feel in your happiness, and the respect with which

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

EVERY religion is a system of opinions and conduct, founded on the true or false notions which we form respecting the Deity.

To judge of the truth of a system, we must examine its principles, see if they be in agreement one with another, and ascertain that every part thereof is an additional support to that system. For a religion to be true, it must give us true notions of God. It is only by the aid of our reason that it is possible for us to judge whether the attributes which theology ascribes to the Deity, be true or not; and truth, as it regards man, is nothing more than a conformity to reason. Thus we see it is this same reason, now attempted to be proscribed, which is alone capable of enabling us to judge of the truths that religion offers to us. The true God must be a God conformable to reason, and

true worship cannot consist in any acts but those which reason approves.

Religion is important only in proportion to the advantages it procures for mankind. The best religion is that which enables those who profess it, to enjoy benefits that are real, substantial, and lasting. A false religion can give nothing to those who practise it that is not false, chimerical, and of short duration. It is for reason to judge whether the advantages procured are real or imaginary; and it belongs to reason to decide whether a religion, a worship, a system of conduct, be advantageous or injurious to the human race.

It is according to these incontestible principles that I proceed to examine the Christian religion. I begin by analyzing the ideas which it gives us of the Deity, whom it boasts to make known to us in a more perfect manner than all the other religions in the world. I shall examine whether these ideas agree one with another; whether the dogmas taught by this religion are in reality conformable to these fundamental rules, and can be reconciled with them; and whether the conduct it prescribes answers to the conceptions it gives us of the Deity. I shall then close the subject with an examination of the advantages which the Christian religion procures to mankind; advantages which, in the opinion of its partisans, infinitely surpass those which result from all the other religions of the earth.

Christianity admits for its basis, the belief of one God, whom it defines to be a pure spirit, an eternal, independent, and immutable intelligence, who performs every thing, knows every thing, foresees every thing, and fills the universe with his immensity. He created out of nothing, the world, and all it contains; he preserves and governs it according to the laws of his wisdom, his goodness, his justice, and the infinite perfections displayed in all his works.

These are the ideas which Christianity gives us of the Deity. Let us see, then, if they agree with the

other notions which this religious system presents to us, under the pretence that they were revealed by God himself, and that from him alone we hold those truths which he has hidden from the rest of mankind, to whom his perfections have never been made known. Thus the Christian religion is founded on a particular revelation. To whom was this revelation made? First to Abraham, and then to his posterity. The God of the universe, the Father of all mankind, resolved to make himself known only to the descendants of a Chaldean, who during the space of some thousands of years, were in exclusive possession of the knowledge of the true God. By an act of his special goodness, the Jews were a long time the only people who were favoured with that knowledge which is equally necessary to all mankind. This was the only people that knew how to conduct themselves towards the Supreme Being; all other nations were in darkness, or had ideas that were imperfect, ridiculous, and criminal respecting the Sovereign of Nature.

Thus, at the very first step, we perceive that Christianity annihilates the goodness and justice of its God. A particular revelation announces a partial God, who favours part of his children to the prejudice of all the rest; who consults only his own caprice, instead of rewarding real merit; who from his inability to give happiness to the whole human race, shews his tenderness only to a few individuals, who are nevertheless as much incapacitated to please him as the rest of their brethren. What shall we say of a father placed at the head of a numerous family, who should shew his parental kindness only to one of his children; who should fix the whole of his attention on him alone, and who should be dissatisfied with all the rest for not performing his will, although he had never consented to let them approach his person. Should we not accuse such a father of caprice, cruelty, stupidity and folly, were he to inflict his wrath on those children, whom he himself had excluded from his presence? Should

we not tax him with an injustice of which only the most senseless of our species could be capable, were he to punish them for not obeying commands, which he had not condescended to make known to them ?

Let us conclude then, Madam, that a particular revelation does not suppose God to be good, impartial, and equitable, but that it rather supposes an unjust and a whimsical tyrant, who though he may display a kindness and a preference for some of his creatures, is for that very reason cruel to all the rest. This being the case, revelation does not prove the goodness, but it proves the caprice and partiality of the God whom the Christian religion teaches us to regard as a being of infinite wisdom, benevolence and equity, and as the common Father of all the inhabitants of the earth. If the interest and self-love of those whom he has favoured, cause them to admire the profound ways of a God, because he heaps benefits upon them to the injury of their fellow-creatures, he must appear very unjust to those who are the victims of his partiality.

Nothing but pride could persuade those men, that they were, to the exclusion of all others, the people cherished by Providence.

Blinded by their vanity, they did not perceive that his universal and infinite goodness, was belied by supposing him capable of giving a preference to some particular men, or some particular nations, all of whom ought to be equal in his eyes, if it be true that they are equally the work of his hands.

Nevertheless on particular revelations, are founded all the religions of the world. As each man has the vanity to think himself the most important being in the universe, so is each nation persuaded that to the exclusion of all others, it ought to enjoy the tenderness of the Sovereign of Nature. If the Indians imagine that it is to them only that Brama has spoken ; the Jews and Christians, persuade themselves that

for them alone, the world was created, and that it is to them alone that God has revealed himself.

But let us for a moment suppose that God has really manifested himself; how could a pure Spirit render himself sensible? What shape did he take? What kind of material organs did he make use of in speaking? How did the infinite Being communicate his thoughts to finite beings? I shall be answered that to accommodate himself to the weakness of his creatures, he employed in his ministry, a chosen number of men to announce his will to others; that he has filled them with his own spirit, and spoken by their mouths.

But how shall we conceive the infinite Being capable of uniting himself with the finite nature of man? How shall I ascertain whether he who pretends to be inspired by the Deity, does not publish his own reveries or impositions for the oracles of heaven? How shall I ascertain if it be really true that God speaks by his voice?—It is immediately replied that to give weight to the words of those whom he has chosen to be his interpreters, God has communicated to them a portion of his omnipotence, and that they have performed miracles which prove their divine mission. On my asking, what is a miracle? I am told that it is an operation contrary to the laws of nature which God himself has fixed; to which I reply, that, according to the ideas I have formed of the divine wisdom, it appears to me impossible that an immutable God can change the wise laws which he himself has established. I thence conclude that miracles are impossible, seeing they are incompatible with our ideas of the wisdom and immutability of the Creator of the universe. Besides, these miracles would be useless to God? If he be omnipotent, can he not modify the minds of his creatures according to his own will?

To convince and to persuade them, he has only to will that they shall be convinced and persuaded. He

has only to tell them things that are clear and sensible, things that may be demonstrated ; and to evidence of such a kind, they will not fail to give their assent. To do this, he will have no need either of miracles or interpreters ; truth alone is sufficient to win mankind.

Supposing, nevertheless, the utility and possibility of these miracles, how shall I ascertain whether the wonderful operation which I see performed by the interpreter of the Deity, be conformable or contrary to the laws of nature ? Am I acquainted with all these laws ? May not he who speaks to me in the name of the Lord, execute by natural means, though to me unknown, those works which appear altogether extraordinary ? How shall I assure myself that he does not deceive me ? Does not my ignorance of the secrets and shifts of his art, expose me to be the dupe of an able impostor, who might make use of the name of God to inspire me with respect, and to screen his deception ? Thus, his pretended miracles ought to make me suspect him, even though I were a witness of them ; but how would the case stand, were these miracles said to have been performed some thousands of years before my existence ? I shall be told that they were attested by a multitude of witnesses ; but if I cannot trust to myself when a miracle is performing, how shall I have confidence in others, who may be either more ignorant, or more stupid than myself, or who perhaps thought themselves interested in supporting by their testimony, tales entirely destitute of reality ?

If, on the contrary, I admit these miracles, what do they prove to me ? Will they furnish me with the belief, that God has made use of his omnipotence to convince me of things, which are in direct opposition to the ideas I have formed of his essence, his nature, and his divine perfections ? If I be persuaded that God is immutable, a miracle will not force me to believe that he is subject to change. If I be convinced that God is just and good, a miracle will never be

sufficient to persuade me that he is unjust and wicked. If I possess an idea of his wisdom, all the miracles in the world would not persuade me that God would act like a madman. Shall I be told, that he would consent to perform miracles that destroy his divinity, or that are proper only to erase from the minds of men the ideas which they ought to entertain of his infinite perfections? This, however, is what would happen were God himself to perform, or to grant the power of performing miracles in favour of a particular revelation. He would, in that case, derange the course of nature, to teach the world that he is capricious, partial, unjust, and cruel; he would make use of his omnipotence purposely to convince us, that his goodness was insufficient for the welfare of his creatures; he would make a vain parade of his power, to hide his inability to convince mankind by a single act of his will. In short, he would interfere with the eternal and immutable laws of nature, to shew us that he is subject to change, and to announce to mankind some important news, which they had hitherto been destitute of, notwithstanding all his goodness.

Thus under whatever point of view we regard revelation, by whatever miracles we may suppose it attested, it will always be in contradiction to the ideas we have of the Deity. They will shew us that he acts in an unjust and an arbitrary manner, consulting only his own whims in the favours he bestows, and continually changing his conduct; that he was unable to communicate all at once to mankind, the knowledge necessary to their existence, and to give them that degree of perfection, of which their natures were susceptible. Hence, Madam, you may see, that the supposition of a revelation, can never be reconciled with the infinite goodness, justice, omnipotence, and immutability of the Sovereign of the universe.

They will not fail to tell you, that the Creator of all things, the independent Monarch of Nature is the master of his favours; that he owes nothing to his crea-

tures ; that he can dispose of them as he pleases, without any injustice, and without their having any right of complaint ; that man is incapable of sounding the profundity of his decrees, and that his justice is not the justice of men. But all these answers which divines have continually in their mouths, serve only to accelerate the destruction of those sublime ideas, which they have given us of the Deity. The result appears to be, that God conducts himself according to the maxims of a fantastic sovereign, who satisfied in having rewarded some of his favourites, thinks himself justified in neglecting the rest of his subjects, and to leave them groaning in the most deplorable misery.

You must acknowledge, Madam, it is not on such a model, that we can form a powerful, equitable and beneficent God, whose omnipotence ought to enable him to procure happiness to all his subjects, without any fear of exhausting the treasures of his goodness.

If we are told that divine justice bears no resemblance to the justice of men, I reply that in this case, we are not authorized to say that God is *just* ; seeing that by justice, it is not possible for us to conceive any thing, except a similar quality to that called justice by the beings of our own species. If divine justice bears no resemblance to human justice ; if, on the contrary, this justice resembles what we call injustice, then all our ideas confound themselves, and we know not either what we mean or what we say, when we affirm that God is just. According to human ideas (which are however the only ones that men are possessed of) justice will always exclude caprice and partiality ; and never can we prevent ourselves from regarding as iniquitous and vicious, a sovereign, who being both able and willing to occupy himself with the happiness of his subjects, should plunge the greatest number of them into misfortune, and reserve his kindness for those to whom his whims have given the preference.

With respect to telling us, that *God owes nothing*

to his creatures, such an atrocious principle is destructive of every idea of justice and goodness, and tends visibly to sap the foundation of all religion. A God that is just and good, owes happiness to every being to whom he has given existence; he ceases to be just and good, if he produce them only to render them miserable; and he would be destitute of both wisdom and reason, were he to give them birth only to be the victims of his caprice. What should we think of a father bringing children into the world, for the sole purpose of putting their eyes out, and tormenting them at his ease?

On the other hand, every religion is founded on the reciprocal engagements supposed to exist between God and his creatures. If God owe nothing to men; if he be not bound to fulfil his engagements with them, when they fulfil their's, what purpose is religion intended to serve?

What motives can men have to render to the Deity their homage and their worship?

Why should we shew so much officiousness in loving or serving a master, who thinks himself justified in dispensing with all duty towards those he has engaged in his service?

It is easy to perceive that the ideas which they promulgate, are destructive of divine justice, and that they are founded on a fatal prejudice, common among the vulgar, that great power must necessarily place its possessor beyond the laws of equity, that force can give a right to act wickedly, and that no one ought to question the actions of a man sufficiently powerful to follow his own caprices. These notions are visibly borrowed from the conduct of tyrants, who no sooner possess unlimited power, than they cast off all restraint but that of their own fancy, and imagine that justice has nothing to do with their condition. It is in this hideous shape, that our divines have formed their God, whose justice nevertheless they pretend to substantiate; yet, if the conduct attributed to him were true, we

should be compelled to regard him as the most unjust of tyrants, the most partial of fathers and the most fantastical of princes. In short, of all the beings that our minds can conceive, he would certainly be the most fearful and the least worthy of our love. We are likewise told that God, who created all men, wished himself to be known only to a very small number among them ; that whilst these chosen few exclusively enjoyed his kindness, all the rest are the objects of his wrath, and that he created them only with a view of leaving them in ignorance and darkness, in order to inflict on them the most cruel of punishments. We see that these unhappy traits in the character of the Deity, pierce through every shade of the Christian economy ; we find them in the books which they pretend to be inspired, and witness them in the dogmas of predestination and grace.

In a word, this religion announces a despotic deity whom we vainly attempt to justify, whilst every thing related of him serves only to prove his injustice, his capricious tyranny, and whimsical partiality. When we expostulate against his conduct, which, in the eyes of every rational man must appear so inordinate, the priests think to stop our mouths by telling us he is omnipotent ; that he is the master of his own favours ; that he owes nothing to any creature, and that we worms of the earth, have no right to criticise his actions. They finish by intimidating us with the frightful and iniquitous chastisements which are in reserve for all those who dare to murmur at his decrees.

It is easy to perceive the futility of these arguments. Power, I do contend, can never confer the right of violating equity. Let a sovereign be as powerful as he may, he is not on that account less blameable, when in rewards and punishments he follows only his caprice. It is true, we may fear him, we may flatter him, we may pay him servile homage : but never shall we love him sincerely ; never shall we serve him faithfully ; never shall we look up to him as the model of

justice and goodness. If those who receive his kindness believe him to be just and good, those who are the objects of his folly and vigour, cannot prevent themselves from detesting his monstrous iniquity in their hearts.

If we be told that we are only as worms of earth relatively to God, or that we are only like a vase in the hands of a potter, I reply in this case, that there can neither be connection nor moral duty between the creature and his Creator; and I shall hence conclude, that religion is useless, seeing that a worm of earth can owe nothing to the man that crushes it, and that the vase can owe nothing to the potter that has formed it. In the supposition, that man is only a worm, or an earthen vessel in the eyes of the Deity, he would be incapable either of serving him, glorifying him, honouring him, or offending him. We are, however, continually told, that man is capable of merit and demerit in the sight of his God, whom he is ordered to love, serve, and worship. We are likewise assured, that it was man alone, whom the Deity had in view in all his works; that it is for him alone, the universe was created; for him alone, that the course of nature was so often deranged; and, in short, it was with a view of being honoured, cherished, and glorified by man, that God has revealed himself to us. According to the principles of the Christian religion, God does not cease, for a single instant, his occupations for man, *this worm of earth, this earthen vessel*, which he has formed. Nay, more; man is sufficiently powerful to influence the honour and glory of his God; it rests neither with man to please him, or to irritate him, to deserve his favour or his hatred, to appease him or to kindle his wrath.

Do you not perceive, Madam, the striking contradictions of those principles which, nevertheless, form the basis of all revealed religions? Indeed, we cannot find one of them that is not erected on the reciprocal influence between God and man, and between man

and God. Our own species, which are annihilated (if I may use the expression) every time that it becomes necessary to whitewash the Deity from some reproachful stain of injustice and partiality ; these miserable beings, to whom it is pretended that God owes nothing, and who, we are assured, are unnecessary to him for his own felicity ; the human race, which is nothing in his eyes, becomes all at once the principal performer on the stage of nature. We find that mankind are necessary to support the glory of their Creator ; we see them become the sole objects of his care ; we behold in them the power to gladden or afflict him ; we see them meriting his favour, and provoking his wrath. According to these contradictory notions concerning the God of the universe, the source of all felicity, is he not really the most wretched of beings ? We behold him perpetually exposed to the insults of men, who offend him by their thoughts, their words, their actions, and their neglect of duty. They incommode him, they irritate him, by the capriciousness of their minds, by their actions, their desires, and even by their ignorance. If we admit those Christian principles which suppose that the great portion of the human race excites the fury of the Eternal, and that very few of them live in a manner conformable to his views, will it not necessarily result therefrom, that in the immense crowd of beings whom God has created for his glory, only a very small number of them glorify him and please him ; while all the rest are occupied in vexing him, exciting his wrath, troubling his felicity, deranging the order that he loves, frustrating his designs, and forcing him to change his immutable intentions ?

You are, undoubtedly, surprized at the contradictions to be encountered at the very first step we take in examining this religion ; and I take upon myself to predict that your embarrassment will increase as you proceed therein. If you coolly examine the ideas presented to us in the revelation common both to

Jews and Christians, and contained in the books which they tell us are *sacred*, you will find that the Deity who speaks, is always in contradiction with himself; that he becomes his own destroyer, and is perpetually occupied in undoing what he has just done, and in repairing his own workmanship, to which, in the first instance, he was incapable of giving that degree of perfection he wished it to possess. He is never satisfied with his own works, and cannot, in spite of his omnipotence, bring the human race to the point of perfection he intended. The books containing the revelation, on which Christianity is founded, every where display to us a God of goodness in the commission of wickedness; an omnipotent God, whose projects unceasingly miscarry; an immutable God changing his maxims and his conduct; an omniscient God, continually deceived unawares; a resolute God, yet repenting of his most important actions; a God of wisdom, whose arrangements never attain success. He is a great God, who occupies himself with the most puerile trifles; an all-sufficient God, yet subject to jealousy; a powerful God, yet suspicious, vindictive, and cruel; and a just God, yet permitting and prescribing the most atrocious iniquities. In a word, he is a perfect God, yet displaying at the same time such imperfections and vices, that the most despicable of men would blush to resemble him.

Behold, Madam, the God whom this religion orders you to adore *in spirit and in truth*. I reserve for another letter, an analysis of the holy books which you are taught to respect as the oracles of heaven. I now perceive, for the first time, that I have perhaps made too long a dissertation, and I doubt not, you have already perceived, that a system built on a basis possessing so little solidity as that of the God whom his devotees raise with one hand and destroy with the other, can have no stability attached to it, and can be regarded only as a long tissue of errors and contradictions.

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

You have seen, Madam, in my preceding letter, the incompatible and contradictory ideas which this religion gives us of the Deity. You will have seen that the revelation which is announced to us, instead of being the offspring of his goodness and tenderness for the human race, is really only a proof of injustice and partiality, of which a God who is equally just and good, would be entirely incapable. Let us now examine, whether the ideas suggested to us by these books, containing the divine oracles, are more rational, more consistent, or more conformable to the divine perfections. Let us see whether the statements related in the Bible, whether the commands prescribed to us in the name of God himself, are really worthy of God, and display to us the characters of infinite wisdom, goodness, power and justice.

These inspired books go back to the origin of the world. Moses, the confidant, the interpreter, the historian of the Deity, makes us (if we may use such an expression) witnesses of the formation of the universe. He tells us, that the Eternal, tired of his inaction, took it into his head to create a world that was necessary to his glory.

To effect this, he forms matter out of nothing ; a pure spirit produces a substance which has no affinity to himself ; although this God fills all space with his immensity, yet still he found room enough in it to admit the universe, as well as all the material bodies contained therein.

These at least are the ideas which divines wish us to form, respecting the creation, if such a thing were possible, as that of possessing a clear idea of a pure spirit producing matter. But this discussion is throwing us into metaphysical researches which I wish to avoid.

It will be sufficient to tell you that you may console yourself for not being able to comprehend it, seeing that the most profound thinkers who talk about the creation, or the eduction of the world from nothing, have no ideas on the subject more precise than those which you form to yourself. As soon, Madam, as you take the trouble to reflect thereon, you will find that divines, instead of explaining things, have done nothing but invent words in order to render them dubious, and to confound all our natural conceptions.

I will not, however, tire you, by a fastidious display of the blunders which fill the narrative of Moses, which they announce to us as being dictated by the Deity. If we read it with a little attention, we shall perceive in every page, philosophical and astronomical errors, unpardonable in an inspired author, and such as we should consider ridiculous in any man, who in the most superficial manner should have studied and contemplated nature.

You will find for example, light created before the sun, although this star is visibly the source of the light which communicates itself to our globe. You will find the evening and the morning established before the formation of this same sun, whose presence alone produces day, whose absence produces night, and whose different aspects constitute morning and evening. You will there find that the moon is spoken of, as a body possessing its own light, in a similar manner as the sun possesses it, although this planet is a dark body and receives its light from the sun. These ignorant blunders are sufficient to shew you, that the Deity who revealed himself to Moses, was quite unacquainted with the nature of those substances which he had created out of nothing, and that you at present possess more information respecting them, than was once possessed by the Creator of the world.

I am not ignorant that our divines have an answer always ready to those difficulties which would attack their divine science, and place their knowledge for

below that of Galileo, Descartes, Newton, and even below that of young people, who have scarcely studied the first elements of natural philosophy. They will tell us that God in order to render himself intelligible to the savage and ignorant Jews, spoke in conformity to their imperfect notions, in the false and incorrect language of the vulgar. We must not be imposed upon by this solution, which our doctors regard as triumphant, and which they so frequently employ when it becomes necessary to justify the Bible against the ignorance and vulgarities contained therein. We answer them, that a God who knows every thing, and can perform every thing, might by a single word, have rectified the false notions of the people he wished to enlighten, and enabled them to know the nature of bodies more perfectly than the most able men who have since appeared. If it be replied that revelation is not intended to render men learned, but to make them pious, I answer that revelation was not sent to establish false notions, that it would be unworthy of God to borrow the language of falsehood and ignorance; that the knowledge of nature, so far from being an injury to piety, is by the avowal of divines, the most proper study to display the greatness of God. They tell us, that religion would be unmoveable, were it conformable to true knowledge, that we should have no objections to make to the recital of Moses, nor to the philosophy of the Holy Scriptures, if we found nothing but what was continually confirmed by experience, astronomy, and the demonstrations of geometry.

To maintain a contrary opinion, and to say that God is pleased in confounding the knowledge of men and in rendering it useless, is to pretend that he is pleased with making us ignorant and changeable, and that he condemns the progress of the human mind, although we ought to suppose him the author of it. To pretend that God was obliged in the scriptures to conform himself to the language of men, is to pretend that he

withdrew his assistance from those he wished to enlighten, and that he was unable of rendering them susceptible of comprehending the language of truth. This is an observation not to be lost sight of in the examination of revelation, where we find in each page that God expresses himself in a manner quite unworthy of the Deity. Could not an omnipotent God, instead of degrading himself, instead of condescending to speak the language of ignorance, so far enlighten them as to make them understand a language more true, more noble, and more conformable to the ideas which are given us of the Deity? An experienced master, by degrees enables his scholars to understand what he wishes to teach them, and a God ought to be able to communicate to them immediately, all the knowledge he intended to give them.

However, according to Genesis, God after creating the world produced man from the dust of the earth. In the mean while we are assured that he created him *in his own image*; but what was the image of God? How could man, who is at least partly material, represent a pure spirit which excludes all matter?

How could his imperfect mind be formed on the model of a mind possessing all perfection, like that which we suppose in the Creator of the universe? What resemblance, what proportion, what affinity could there be between a finite mind united to a body, and the infinite spirit of the Creator? These, doubtless, are great difficulties; hitherto it has been thought impossible to decide them; and they will probably, for a long time employ the minds of those who strive to understand the incomprehensible meaning of a book, which God provided for our instruction.

But why did God create man? Because he wished to people the universe with intelligent beings who would render him homage, who should witness his wonders, who should glorify him, who should meditate and contemplate his works, and merit his favours by their submission to his laws.

Here we behold man becoming necessary to the dignity of his God, who without him would live without being glorified, who would receive no homage, and who would be the melancholy Sovereign of an empire without subjects, a condition not suited to his vanity. I think it useless to remark to you what little conformity we find between those ideas, and such as are given us of a self-sufficient being, who without the assistance of any other, is supremely happy. All the characters in which the Bible portrays the Deity, are always borrowed from man, or from a proud monarch, and we every where find, that instead of having made man after his own image, it is man that has always made God after the image of himself, that has conferred on him his own way of thinking, his own virtues and his own vices.

But did this man whom the Deity has created for his glory, faithfully fulfil the wishes of his Creator? This subject that he has just acquired, will he be obedient, will he render homage to his power, will he execute his will? He has done nothing of the kind, Scarcely is he created when he becomes rebellious to the orders of his sovereign; he eats a forbidden fruit which God has placed in his way in order to tempt him, and by this act, draws the divine wrath, not only on himself, but on all his posterity. Thus it is, that he annihilates at one blow the great projects of the omnipotent, who had no sooner made man for his glory than he becomes offended with that conduct which he ought to have foreseen.

Here he finds himself obliged to change his projects with regard to mankind, he becomes their enemy, and condemns them and the whole of the race (who had not yet the power of sinning) to innumerable penalties, to cruel calamities, and to death! What do I say? To punishments which death itself shall not terminate. Thus God, who wished to be glorified, is not glorified; he seems to have created man only to offend him, that he might afterwards punish the offender.

In this recital, which is founded on the Bible, can you recognize, Madam, an omnipotent God, whose orders are always accomplished, and whose projects are all necessarily executed? In a God who tempts us, or who permits us to be tempted, do you behold a being of beneficence and sincerity? In a God who punishes the being he has tempted or subjected to temptation, do you perceive any equity? In a God who extends his vengeance even to those who have not sinned, do you behold any shadow of justice? In a God who is irritated at what he knew must necessarily happen, can you imagine any foresight? In the rigorous punishments by which this God is destined to avenge himself of his feeble creatures, both in this world and the next, can you perceive the least appearance of goodness?

It is however this history, or rather this fable, on which is founded the whole edifice of the Christian religion.

If the first man had not been disobedient, the human race had not been the object of the divine wrath, and would have had no need of a redeemer. If this God who knows all things, foresees all things, and possesses all power, had prevented or foreseen the fault of Adam, it would not have been necessary for God to sacrifice his own innocent son to appease his fury. Mankind, for whom he created the universe, would then have been always happy; they would not have incurred the displeasure of that Deity who demanded their adoration. In a word, if this apple had not been imprudently eaten by Adam and his spouse, mankind would not have suffered so much misery, man would have enjoyed without interruption, the immortal happiness to which God had destined him, and the views of Providence towards his creatures would not have been frustrated.

It would be useless to make reflections on notions so whimsical, so contrary to the wisdom, the power and the justice of the Deity. It is doing quite enough

to compare the different objects which the the Bible presents to us to perceive their inutility, absurdities, and contradictions. We there see, continually, a wise God conducting himself like a madman. He defeats his own projects that he may afterwards repair them; repents of what he has done; acts as if he had foreseen nothing, and is forced to permit proceedings which his omnipotence could not prevent. In the writings revealed by this God, he appears occupied only in blackening his own character, degrading himself, vilifying himself, even in the eyes of men whom he would excite to worship him and pay him homage; overturning and confounding the minds of those whom he had designed to enlighten. What has just been said, might suffice to undeceive us with respect to a book which would pass better as being intended to destroy the idea of a Deity, than as one containing the oracles dictated and revealed by him. Nothing but a heap of absurdies could possibly result from principles so false and irrational; nevertheless, let us take another glance at the principal objects which this divine work continually offers to our consideration. Let us pass on to the deluge. The holy books tell us, that, in spite of the will of the Almighty, the whole human race, who had already been punished by infirmities, accidents and death, continued to give themselves up to the most unaccountable depravity. God becomes irritated and repents having created them. Doubtless he could not have foreseen this depravity, yet, rather than change the wicked disposition of their hearts, which he holds in his own hands, he performs the most surprizing, the most impossible of miracles. He at once drowns all the inhabitants, with the exception of some favourites, whom he destines to re-people the earth with a chosen race, that will render themselves more agreeable to their God. But does the Almighty succeed in this new project? The chosen race, saved from the waters of the deluge, on the wreck of the earth's destruction, begin again to offend the Sovereign of

Nature, abandon themselves to new crimes, give themselves up to idolatry, and forgetting the recent effects of celestial vengeance, seem intent only on provoking heaven by their wickedness. In order to provide a remedy, God chooses for his favourite the idolator Abraham. To him he discovers himself; he orders him to renounce the worship of his fathers, and embrace a new religion. To guarantee this covenant, the Sovereign of nature prescribes a melancholy, ridiculous and whimsical ceremony, to the observance of which a God of wisdom attaches his favours. The posterity of this chosen man are consequently to enjoy for everlasting, the greatest advantages; they will always be the most partial object of tenderness with the Almighty; they will be happier than all other nations whom the Deity will abandon to occupy himself only for them.

These solemn promises, however, have not prevented the race of Abraham from becoming the slaves of a vile nation, that was detested by the Eternal; his dear friends experienced the most cruel treatment on the part of the Egyptians. God could not guarantee them from the misfortune that had befallen them; but in order to free them again, he raised up to them a liberator, a chief, who performed the most astonishing miracles. At the voice of Moses, all nature is confounded; God employs him to declare his will, yet he who could create and annihilate the world, could not subdue Pharaoh. The obstinacy of this Prince defeats in ten successive trials, the divine omnipotence of which Moses is the depositary. After having vainly attempted to overcome a monarch, whose heart God had been pleased to harden, God has recourse to the most ordinary method of rescuing his people; he tells them to run off, after having first counselled them to rob the Egyptians. The fugitives are pursued, but God, who protects these robbers, orders the sea to swallow up the miserable people, who had the temerity to run after their property.

The Deity would, doubtless, have reason to be satisfied with the conduct of a people that he had just delivered by such a great number of miracles. Alas ! Neither Moses nor the Almighty, could succeed in persuading this obstinate people to abandon the false gods of that country where they had been so miserable ; they preferred them to the living God who had just saved them. All the miracles which the Eternal was daily performing in favour of Israel, could not overcome their stubbornness, which was still more inconceivable and wonderful than the greatest miracles. These wonders which are now extolled as convincing proofs of the divine mission of Moses, were by the confession of this same Moses, who has himself transmitted us the accounts, incapable of convincing the people who were witnesses of them, and never produced the good effects which the Deity proposed to himself in performing them.

The credulity, the obstinacy, the continual depravity of the Jews, Madam, are the most indubitable proofs of the falsity of the miracles of Moses, as well as those of all his successors, to whom the Scriptures attribute a supernatural power. If in the face of these facts it be pretended that these miracles are attested, we shall be compelled, at least, to agree that, according to the Bible account, they have been entirely useless, that the Deity has been constantly baffled in all his projects, and that he could never make of the Hebrews a people submissive to his will.

We find, however, God continues obstinately employed to render his people worthy of him ; he does not lose sight of them for a moment ; he sacrifices whole nations to them, and sanctions their rapine, violence, treason, murder, and usurpation. In a word, he permits them to do any thing to obtain his ends. He is continually sending them chiefs, prophets, and wonderful men, who try in vain to bring them to their duty. The whole history of the Old Testament displays nothing but the vain efforts of God to vanquish

the obstinacy of his people. To succeed in this, he employs kindnesses, miracles, and severity. Sometimes he delivers up to them whole nations to be hated, pillaged, and exterminated; at other times he permits these same nations to exercise over his favourite people, the greatest of cruelties. He delivers them into the hand of their enemies, who are likewise the enemies of God himself. Idolatrous nations become masters of the Jews, who are left to feel the insults, the contempt, and the most unheard-of severities, and are sometimes compelled to sacrifice to idols, and to violate the law of their God. The race of Abraham becomes the prey of impious nations. The Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, make them successively undergo the most cruel treatment, and suffer the most bloody outrages, and God even permits his temple to be polluted in order to punish the Jews.

To terminate, at length, the troubles of his cherished people, the pure Spirit that created the universe, sends his own son. It is said that he had already been announced by his prophets, though this was certainly done in a manner admirably adapted to prevent his being known on his arrival. This Son of God becomes a man through his kindness for the Jews, whom he came to liberate, to enlighten, and to render the most happy of mortals. Being clothed with divine omnipotence, he performs the most astonishing miracles, which do not, however, convince the Jews. He can do every thing but convert them. Instead of converting and liberating the Jews, he is himself compelled, notwithstanding all his miracles, to undergo the most infamous of punishments, and to terminate his life like a common malefactor. God is condemned to death by the people he came to save. The Eternal hardened and blinded those among whom he sent his own Son; he did not foresee that this Son would be rejected. What do I say? He managed matters in such a way as not to be recognized, and took such steps that his favourite people derived no benefit from the coming of

the Messiah. In a word, the Deity seems to have taken the greatest care that his projects, so favourable to the Jews, should be nullified and rendered unprofitable.

When we expostulate against a conduct so strange and so unworthy of the Deity, we are told it was necessary for every thing to take place in such a manner, for the accomplishment of prophecies, which had announced that the Messiah should be disowned, rejected, and put to death. But why did God, who knows all, and who foresaw the fate of his dear Son, form the project of sending him among the Jews, to whom he must have known that his mission would be useless? Would it not have been easier neither to announce him nor send him? Would it not have been more conformable to divine omnipotence, to spare himself the trouble of so many miracles, so many prophecies, so much useless labour, so much wrath, and so many sufferings to his own Son, by giving at once to the human race that degree of perfection he intended for them?

We are told it was necessary that the Deity should have a victim; that to repair the fault of the first man, no expedient would be sufficient but the death of another God; that the only God of the universe could not be appeased but by the blood of his own Son. I reply, in the first place, that God had only to prevent the first man from committing a fault; that this would have spared him much chagrin and sorrow, and saved the life of his dear Son. I reply, likewise, that man is incapable of offending God unless God either permitted it, or consented to it. I shall not examine how it is possible for God to have a son, who being as much a God as himself, can be subject to death. I reply, also, that it is impossible to perceive such a grave fault and sin in taking an apple; and that we can find very little proportion between the crime committed against the Deity by eating an apple, and his Son's death.

I know well enough, I shall be told that these are all mysteries ; but I in my turn shall reply, that mysteries are imposing words, imagined by men who know not how to get themselves out of the labyrinth, into which their false reasonings and senseless principles have once plunged them.

Be this as it may, we are assured that the Messiah or the Deliverer of the Jews, had been clearly predicted and described, by the prophecies contained in the Old Testament. In this case, I demand why the Jews have disowned this wonderful man, this God whom God sent to them ? They answer me, that the incredulity of the Jews was likewise predicted, and that divers inspired writers had announced the death of the Son of God. To which I reply, that a sensible God ought not to have sent him under such circumstances, that an omnipotent God ought to have adopted measures more efficacious and certain, to bring his people into the way in which he wished them to go. If he wished not to convert, and to liberate the Jews, it was quite useless to send his Son among them, and thereby expose him to a death that was both certain and foreseen.

They will not fail to tell me, that in the end, the Divine patience became tired of the excesses of the Jews ; that the immutable God, who had sworn an eternal alliance with the race of Abraham, wished at length to break the treaty, which he had however, assured them should last for ever. It is pretended that God had determined to reject the Hebrew nation, in order to adopt the Gentiles, whom he had hated and despised nearly four thousand years. I reply, that this discourse is very little conformable to the ideas we ought to have of a God who *changes not*, whose mercy is *infinite*, and whose goodness is *inexhaustible*. I shall tell them, that in this case, the Messiah announced by the Jewish prophets was destined for the Jews, and that he ought to have been their liberator, instead of destroying their worship, and their religion. If it be

possible to unravel any thing in these obscure, enigmatical, and symbolical oracles of the prophets of Judea, as we find them in the Bible ; if there be any means of guessing the meaning of the obscure riddles, which have been decorated with the pompous name of prophecies, we shall perceive that the inspired writers, when they are in a good humour, always promise the Jews, a man that will redress their grievances, restore the kingdom of Judah, and not one that should destroy the religion of Moses. If it were for the Gentiles that the Messiah should come, he is no longer the Messiah promised to the Jews, and announced by their prophets. If Jesus be the Messiah of the Jews, he could not be the destroyer of their nation.

Should I be told, that Jesus himself declared that he came to fulfil the law of Moses, and not to abolish it, I ask, why Christians do not observe the law of the Jews ?

Thus, in whatever light we regard Jesus Christ, we perceive that he could not be the man whom the prophets have predicted, since it is evident that he came only to destroy the religion of the Jews, which though instituted by God himself, had nevertheless become disagreeable to him. If this inconstant God, who was wearied with the worship of the Jews, had at length repented of his injustice towards the Gentiles, it was to them, that he ought to have sent his Son. By acting in this way, he would at least, have saved his old friends from a frightful *deicide* which he forced them to commit, because they were not able to recognize the God he sent amongst them. Besides, the Jews were very pardonable in not acknowledging their expected Messiah, in an artisan of Galilee, who was destitute of all the characteristics which the prophets had related, and during whose life-time, his fellow-citizens were neither liberated nor happy.

We are told, that he performed miracles. He healed the sick ; caused the lame to walk ; gave sight to the blind, and raised the dead. At length, he ac-

accomplished his own resurrection. It might be so believed; yet, he has visibly failed in that miracle, for which alone he came upon earth. He was never able either to persuade or to convert the Jews, who witnessed all the daily wonders that he performed. Notwithstanding these prodigies, they placed him ignominiously on the cross. In spite of his divine power, he was incapable of escaping punishment. He wished to die, to render the Jews culpable, and to have the pleasure of rising again the third day, in order to confound the ingratitude and obstinacy, of his fellow-citizens. What is the result? Did his fellow-citizens concede to this great miracle, and have they at length acknowledged him? Far from it; they never saw him. The Son of God, who rose from the dead in secrecy, showed himself only to his adherents. They alone pretend to have conversed with him. They alone, have furnished us with the particulars of his life and miracles, and yet by such suspicious testimony, they wish to convince us of the divinity of his mission, eighteen hundred years after the event, although he could not convince his cotemporaries the Jews.

We are then told, that many Jews have been converted to Jesus Christ; that after his death many others were converted; that the witnesses of the life and miracles of the Son of God; have sealed their testimony with their blood; that men will not die to attest falsehood; that by a visible effect of the divine power, the people of a great part of the earth have adopted Christianity, and still persist in the belief of this divine religion.

In all this, I perceive nothing like a miracle. I see nothing but what is conformable to the ordinary progress of the human mind. An enthusiast, a dexterous impostor, a crafty juggler, can easily find adherents in a stupid, ignorant and superstitious populace.¹ These followers, captivated by counsels, or seduced by promises, consent to quit a painful and laborious life, to follow a man who gives them to understand that he

will make them *fishers of men*; that is to say, he will enable them to subsist by his cunning tricks, at the expense of the multitude who are always credulous. The juggler, with the assistance of his remedies, can perform cures which seem miraculous to ignorant spectators. These simple creatures immediately regard him as a supernatural being. He adopts this opinion himself, and confirms the high notions which his partisans have formed respecting him. He feels himself interested in maintaining this opinion among his sectaries, and finds out the secret of exciting their enthusiasm. To accomplish this point, our Empirick becomes a preacher; he makes use of riddles, obscure sentences, and parables to the multitude, that always admire what they do not understand. To render himself more agreeable to the people, he declaims among poor, ignorant, foolish men, against the rich, the great, the learned; but above all, against the *priests*, who in all ages, have been *avaricious, imperious, uncharitable, and burthensome* to the people. If these discourses be eagerly received among the vulgar, who are always morose, envious, and jealous, they displease all those who see themselves the objects of the invective and satire of the popular preacher.

They consequently wish to check his progress, they lay snares for him, they seek to surprize him in a fault, in order that they may unmask him and have their revenge. By dint of imposture he outwits them; yet, in consequence of his miracles and illusions, he at length discovers himself. He is then seized and punished, and none of his adherents abide by him, except a few idiots that nothing can undeceive; none but partisans accustomed to lead with him a life of idleness; none but dexterous knaves who wish to continue their impositions on the public, by deceptions similar to those of their old master, by obscure, unconnected, confused, and fanatical harangues, and by declamations against *magistrates* and *priests*. These who have the power in their own hands, finish by persecuting them,

imprisoning them, flogging them, chastising them, and putting them to death. Poor wretches habituated to poverty, undergo all these sufferings with a fortitude which we frequently meet with in malefactors. In some we find their courage fortified by the zeal of fanaticism. This fortitude surprizes, agitates, excites pity, and irritates the spectators against those who torment men, whose constancy makes them looked upon as being innocent, who it is supposed, may possibly be right, and for whom compassion likewise interests itself. It is thus, that enthusiasm is propagated, and that persecution always augments the number of the partisans of those who are persecuted.

I shall leave to you, Madam, the trouble of applying the history of our juggler and his adherents, to that of the founder, the apostles, and the martyrs of the Christian religion.

With whatever art they have written the life of Jesus Christ, which we hold only from his apostles, or their disciples, it furnishes a sufficiency of materials on which to found our conjectures. I shall only observe to you, that the Jewish nation was remarkable for its credulity; that the companions of Jesus were chosen from among the dregs of the people; that Jesus always gave a preference to the populace, with whom he wished, doubtlessly, to form a rampart against the *priests*; and that, at last, Jesus was seized immediately after the most splendid of his miracles. We see him put to death immediately after the resurrection of Lazarus, which, even according to the Gospel account, bears the most evident characters of fraud, which are visible to every one who examines it without prejudice.

I imagine, Madam, that what I have just stated will suffice to shew you what opinion you ought to entertain respecting the founder of Christianity and his first sectaries. These have been either dupes or fanatics, who permitted themselves to be seduced by deceptions, and by discourses conformable to their desires, or by

dexterous impostors, who knew how to make the best of the tricks of their old master, to whom they have become such able successors. In this way did they establish a religion which enabled them to live at the people's expence, and which still maintains in abundance, those we pay at such a high rate, for transmitting from father to son the fables, visions, and wonders, which were born and nursed in Judea. The propagation of the Christian faith, and the constancy of their martyrs, have nothing surprizing in them. The people flock after all those that shew them wonders, and receive without reasoning on it, every thing that is told them. They transmit to their children the tales they have heard related, and by degrees these opinions are adopted by kings, by the great, and even by the learned.

As for the martyrs, their constancy has nothing supernatural in it. The first Christians, as well as all new sectaries, were treated by the Jews and Pagans, as disturbers of the public peace. They were already sufficiently intoxicated with the fanaticism with which their religion inspired them; and were persuaded that God held himself in readiness to crown them, and to receive them into his eternal dwelling. In a word, seeing the heavens opened, and being convinced that the end of the world was approaching, it is not surprizing that they had courage to set punishment at defiance, to endure it with constancy, and to despise death. To these motives, founded on their religious opinions, many others were added, which are always of such a nature, as to operate strongly upon the minds of men. Those, who as Christians were imprisoned, and ill-treated on account of their faith, were visited, consoled, encouraged, honoured, and loaded with kindnesses by their brethren, who took care of, and succoured them during their detention, and who almost adored them after their death. Those on the other hand, who displayed weakness, were despised and detested, and when they gave way to repentance, they were com-

pelled to undergo a rigorous penitence, which lasted as long as they lived. Thus were the most powerful motives united to inspire the martyrs with courage ; and this courage has nothing more supernatural about it, than that which determines us daily to encounter the most perilous dangers, through the fear of dishonouring ourselves in the eyes of our fellow-citizens. Cowardice would expose us to infamy all the rest of our days. There is nothing miraculous in the constancy of a man, to whom an offer is made on the one hand, of eternal happiness, and the highest honours ; and who on the other hand, sees himself menaced with hatred, contempt, and the most lasting regret.

You perceive then, Madam, that nothing can be easier, than to overthrow the proofs by which Christian doctors establish the revelation, which they pretend is so well authenticated. Miracles, martyrs, and prophecies, prove nothing.

Were all the wonders true, that are related in the Old and New Testament, they would afford no proof in favour of divine omnipotence, but on the contrary, would prove the inability under which the Deity has continually laboured, of convincing mankind of the truths he wished to announce to them. On the other hand, supposing these miracles to have produced all the effects which the Deity had a right to expect from them, we have no longer any reason to believe them, except on the tradition and recitals of others, which are often suspicious, faulty, and exaggerated. The miracles of Moses, are attested only by Moses, or by Jewish writers, interested in making them believed by the people they wished to govern. The miracles of Jesus are attested only by his disciples, who sought to obtain adherents, in relating to a credulous people, prodigies to which they pretended to have been witnesses, or which some of them perhaps, believed they had really seen. All those who deceive mankind are not always cheats, they are frequently deceived by those

who are knaves in reality. Besides, I believe I have sufficiently proved, that miracles are repugnant to the essence of an immutable God, as well as to his wisdom, which will not permit him to alter the wise laws he has himself established. In short, miracles are useless, since those related in Scripture have not produced the effects which God expected from them.

The proof of the Christian religion taken from prophecy, has no better foundation. Whoever will examine without prejudice, these oracles pretended to be divine, will find only an ambiguous, unintelligible, absurd, and unconnected jargon, entirely unworthy of a God who intended to display his prescience, and to instruct his people with regard to future events. There does not exist in the Holy Scriptures, a single prophecy sufficiently precise, to be literally applied to Jesus Christ. To convince yourself of this truth, ask the most learned of our doctors, which are the formal prophecies, wherein they have the happiness to discover the Messiah? You will then perceive, that it is only by the aid of forced explanations, figures, parables, and mystical interpretations, by which they are enabled to bring forward any thing sensible and applicable to the *god-made-man* whom they tell us to adore. It would seem as if the Deity had made predictions only that we might understand nothing about them.

In these equivocal oracles, whose meaning it is impossible to penetrate, we find nothing but the language of intoxication, fanaticism, and delirium. When we fancy we have found something intelligible, it is easy to perceive that the prophets intended to speak of events that took place in their own age, or of personages who had preceded them. It is thus, that our doctors apply gratuitously to Christ, prophecies, or rather narratives of what happened respecting David, Solomon, Cyrus, &c.

We imagine, we see the chastisement of the Jewish people announced in recitals, where it is evident the only matter in question was the Babylonish captivity.

In this event, so long prior to Jesus Christ, they have imagined finding a prediction of the dispersion of the Jews, supposed to be a visible punishment for their *deicide*, and which they now wish to pass off as an indubitable proof of the truth of Christianity.

It is not then astonishing, that the ancient and modern Jews, do not see in the prophets what our doctors teach us, and what they themselves imagine they have seen. Jesus himself has not been more happy in his predictions, than his predecessors. In the gospel, he announces to his disciples in the most formal manner, the destruction of the world, and the last judgment, as events that were at hand, and which must take place before the existing generation had passed away. Yet, the world still endures, and appears in no danger of finishing. It is true, our doctors pretend, that in the prediction of Jesus Christ, he spoke of the ruin of Jerusalem, by Vespasian and Titus; but none but those who have not read the gospel would submit to such a change, or satisfy themselves with such an evasion. Besides, in adopting it, we must confess at least, that the Son of God himself, was unable to prophesy with greater precision than his obscure predecessors.

Indeed, at every page of these sacred books, which we are assured were inspired by God himself, this God seems to have made a revelation only to conceal himself. He does not speak but to be misunderstood. He announces his oracles in such a way only that we can neither comprehend them, nor make any application of them. He performs miracles only to make unbelievers. He manifests himself to mankind only to stupify their judgment, and bewilder the reason he had bestowed on them. The Bible continually represents God to us, as a seducer, an enticer, a suspicious tyrant, who knows not what kind of conduct to observe with respect to his subjects; who amuses himself by laying snares for his creatures, and who tries them that he may have the pleasure of inflicting a punish-

ment for yielding to his temptations. This God is occupied only in building to destroy, in demolishing to rebuild. Like a child disgusted with its play-things, he is continually undoing what he has done, and breaking what was the object of his desires. We find no foresight, no constancy, no consistency in his conduct; no connexion, no clearness in his discourses. When he performs any thing, he sometimes approves what he has done, and at other times repents of it. He irritates and vexes himself with what he has permitted to be done, and in spite of his infinite power, he suffers men to offend him, and consents to let Satan, his creature, derange all his projects. In a word, the revelations of the Christians and Jews, seem to have been imagined only to render uncertain, and to annihilate the qualities attributed to the Deity, and which are declared to constitute his essence. The whole Scripture, the entire system of the Christian religion, appears to be founded only on the incapability of God, who was unable to render the human race as wise, as good, and as happy, as he wished them. The death of his innocent Son, who was immolated to his vengeance, is entirely useless for the most numerous portion of the earth's inhabitants; almost the whole human race, in spite of the continual efforts of the Deity, continue to offend him, to frustrate his designs, resist his will, and to persevere in their wickedness.

It is on notions so fatal, so contradictory, and so unworthy of a God who is just, wise, and good; of a God that is rational, independent, immutable, and omnipotent, on whom the Christian religion is founded, and which religion is said to be established for ever, by God, who nevertheless became disgusted with the religion of the Jews, with whom he had made and sworn an eternal covenant.

Time must prove whether God be more constant and faithful in fulfilling his engagements with the Christians, than he has been to fulfil those he made with Abraham and his posterity. I confess, Madam,

that his past conduct, alarms me as to what he may finally perform. If he himself acknowledged by the mouth of Ezekiel, that the laws he had given to the Jews *were not good*; he may very possibly, some day or other, find fault with those which he has given to Christians.

Our priests themselves, seem to partake of my suspicions, and to fear that God will be wearied of that protection, which he has so long granted to his church. The inquietudes which they evince, the efforts which they make to hinder the civilization of the world; the persecutions which they raise against all those who contradict them, seem to prove that they mistrust the promises of Jesus Christ, and that they are not certainly convinced of the eternal durability of a religion which does not appear to them divine, but, because it gives them the right to command like gods, over their fellow-citizens. It would be, without doubt, exceedingly disagreeable to them, were their empire overthrown; however, it is only through fear, that both the sovereigns and people of the earth have endured their yoke so long: the sovereign of heaven is already sufficiently disgusted with them.

May I then, dare to hope, Madam, that the reading of this letter will undeceive you effectually, respecting a blind veneration for books which they call divine, seeing they appear to have been written rather to degrade and lessen the character of the Deity, than to prove him their author. In my first letter, I trust you see that the dogmas established by those books, or invented long since to justify the ideas they give us of the Deity, are not less contradictory than our notions of that Being are infinitely perfect. A system which sets out with false principles, can never end but in a mass of falsehoods.

I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

You know, Madam, that our teachers pretend that those revealed books which I have summarily examined in my preceding letter, do not contain one word, which is not by the inspiration of the spirit of God. What I have said to you ought, therefore, on this supposition to prove, that the Divinity has made a work the most mis-shapen, the most contradictory, the most unintelligible that has ever existed; in a word, a work of which any man of sense would blush to be the author. If any prophesy hath verified itself for the Christians, it is that of Isaiah, which saith, "Hearing ye shall hear, but shall not understand." But in this case, we reply that it was sufficiently useless to speak not to be comprehended, to reveal *that* which cannot be comprehended, is to reveal *nothing*.

We need not then, be surprised if the Christians, notwithstanding the revelation of which they assure us they have been the favourites, have no precise ideas either of the Divinity, or of His will, or the way in which His oracles are to be interpreted. The book from which they should be able to do so, serves only to confound the simplest notions, to throw them into the greatest incertitude, and create eternal disputations. If it was the project of the Divinity, it would without doubt, be attended with perfect success. The teachers of Christianity never agree on the manner in which they are to understand the truths, that God has given himself the trouble to reveal; all the efforts which they have employed to this time, have not yet been capable of making any thing clear, and the dogmas which they have successively invented, have been insufficient to justify to the understanding of one man of good sense, the conduct of an infinitely perfect Being.

Hence, many among them perceiving the inconveniencies which would result, from the reading of the

holy books, have carefully kept them out of the hands of the vulgar and illiterate; for they plainly foresaw, that if they were read by such, they would necessarily bring on themselves reproach, since it would never fail that every honest man of good sense, would discover in those books only a crowd of absurdities. Thus, the oracles of God, are not even made for those for whom they are addressed; it is requisite to be initiated in the mysteries of priesthood, to have the privilege of discerning in the holy writings, the light which the divinity destined to all his dear children. But, are the theologians themselves able to make plain, the difficulties which the sacred books present in every page? By meditating on the mysteries which they contain; have they given us ideas more plain of the intentions of the divinity? No; without doubt, they explain one mystery by citing another; they scatter new obscurities on previous obscurities; rarely do they agree among themselves, and when by chance their opinions coincide, we are not more enlightened, nor is our judgment more convinced; on the other hand, our reason is the more confounded,

If they do agree on some point, it is only to tell us that human reason, of which God is the author, is depraved; but what is the purport of this coincidence in their opinions, if it be not to tax the Deity with imbecility, injustice, and malignity? For why should God, in creating a reasonable being, not have given him an understanding which nothing could corrupt? They reply to us, by saying: "that the reason of man is necessarily limited; that perfection could not be the portion of a *creature*; that the designs of God are not like those of man." But, in this case, why should the Divinity be offended by the necessary imperfections which he discovers in his creatures? How can a just God require that our mind must admit what it was not made to comprehend? Can He who is above our reason, be understood by us, whose reason is so limited? If God be infinite, how can a finite creature

reason respecting him? If the mysteries and hidden designs of the Divinity are of such a nature as not to be comprehended by man, what good can we derive from their investigation? Had God designed that we should occupy our thoughts with his purposes, would he not have given us an understanding proportionate to the things he wished us to penetrate?

You see then, Madam, that in depressing our reason, in supposing it corrupted, our priests, at the same time, annihilate even the necessity of religion, which cannot be either useful or important to us, if above our comprehension. They do more, in supposing human reason depraved; they accuse God of injustice, in requiring that our reason should conceive what cannot be conceived. They accuse Him of imbecility in not rendering this reason more perfect. In a word, in degrading man, they degrade God, and rob him of those attributes which compose his essence. Would you call him a just and good parent, who, wishing that his children should walk by an obscure route filled with difficulties, would only give them for their conduct a light too weak to find their way, and to avoid the continual dangers by which they are surrounded? Should you find, that this father had foreseen their actual situation, but had given them written instructions, which were both unintelligible and inadequate for their guidance, would you not pronounce him weak and designing, or renounce any report that drew such a picture of a parent?

The priests do not, however, offend us when they say that the corruption of reason and the weakness of the human mind are the consequences of sin. But why has man become sinful? How has the good God permitted his dear children, for whom he created the universe, and of whom he exacts obedience, to offend him, and thereby extinguish, or, at least, weaken the light he had given them? On the other hand, the reason of Adam ought to be, without doubt, completely perfect before his fall. In this

case, why did it not prevent that fall and its consequences? Was the reason of Adam corrupted even before-hand by incurring the wrath of his God? Was it, deplaved before he had done any thing to deprave it? To justify this strange conduct of Providence; to clear him from passing as the author of sin; to save him the ridicule of being the cause, or the accomplice of offences which he did against himself, the theologians have imagined a *being* subordinate to the divine power. It is this secondary being they make the author of all the evil which is committed in the universe. In the impossibility of reconciling the continual disorders of which the world is the theatre, with the purposes of a Deity replete with goodness, the creator and preserver of the universe, who delights in order, and who seeks only the happiness of his creatures, they have trumped up a destructive genius, imbued with wickedness, who conspires to render men miserable, and to overthrow the beneficent views of the Eternal. This bad and perverse being they call *Satan*, the *Devil*, the *Evil One*—and we see him play a great game in all the religions of the world, the founders of which have found in the impotence of Deity, the sources of both good and evil. By the aid of this imaginary being, they have been enabled to resolve all their difficulties; yet they could not foresee that this invention, which went to annihilate or abridge the power of Deity, was a system filled with palpable contradictions, and that if the Devil were really the author of sin, it would be he, in all justice, who ought to undergo all its punishment.

If God is the author of all, it is he who created the Devil; if the Devil is wicked, if he strives to counteract the projects of the Divinity, it is the Divinity who has allowed the overthrow of his projects, or who has not had sufficient authority to prevent the Devil from exercising his power. If God had wished that the Devil should not have existed, the Devil would not have existed. God could annihilate him at one word,

or, at least, God could change his dispositions if injurious to us, and contrary to the projects of a beneficent Providence. Since, then, the Devil does exist, and does such marvellous things as are attributed to him, we are compelled to conclude, that the Divinity has found it good that he should exist and agitate, as he does, all his works by a perpetual interruption and perversion of his designs.

Thus, Madam, the invention of the Devil does not remedy the evil ; on the contrary, it but entangles the priests more and more. By placing to Satan's account all the evil which he commits in the world, they exculpate the Deity of nothing ; all the power with which they have supposed the Devil invested, is taken from that assigned to the Divinity ; and you know very well, that, according to the notions of the Christian religion, the Devil has more adherents than God himself ; they are always stirring their fellow-creatures up to revolt against God ; without ceasing, in despite of God, Satan leads them into perdition, except one man only, who refused to follow him, and who found grace in the eyes of the Lord. You are not ignorant, that the millions that follow the standard of Beelzebub are to be plunged with him into eternal misery.

But even has Satan himself incurred the disgrace of the all-powerful ? By what forfeit has he merited becoming the eternal object of the anger of that God who created him ? The Christian religion will explain all. It informs us, that the Devil was in his origin an angel ; that is to say, a pure spirit full of perfections, created by the Divinity to occupy a distinguishing situation in the celestial court, destined like the other ministers of the Eternal, to receive his orders, and enjoying perpetual blessedness. But he lost himself through ambition ; his pride blinded him, and he dared to revolt against his creator ; he engaged other spirits, as pure as himself, in the same senseless enterprize ; in consequence of his rashness he was hurled headlong out of heaven, his miserable adherents were involved in his fall, and hav-

ing been hardened by the divine pleasure in their foolish dispositions, they have no other occupation assigned them in the universe than to tempt mankind, and endeavour to augment the number of the enemies of God, and the victims of his wrath.

It is by the assistance of this fable, that the Christian doctors perceive the fall of Adam, prepared by the Almighty himself, anterior to the creation of the world. Was it necessary that the divinity should entertain a great desire that man might sin, since he would thereby have an opportunity of providing the means of making him sinful? In effect, it was the Devil who in process of time covered with the skin of a serpent,¹ solicited the mother of the human race to disobey God, and involve her husband in her rebellion. But the difficulty is not removed by these inventions. If Satan, in the time he was an angel, lived in innocence, and merited the good will of his Maker, how came God to suffer him to entertain ideas of pride, ambition, and rebellion? How came this angel of light so blind as not to see the folly of such an enterprise? Did he not know that his Creator was all-powerful? Who was it that tempted Satan? What reason had the Divinity for selecting him to be the object of his fury, the destroyer of his projects, the enemy of his power? If pride be a sin, if the idea itself of rebellion is the greatest of crimes, *sin was, then, anterior to sin*, and Lucifer offended God, even in his state of purity! for, in fine, a being pure, innocent, agreeable to his God, who had all the perfections of which a creature could be susceptible, ought to be exempt from ambition, pride, and folly. We ought, also, to say as much of our first parent, who, notwithstanding his wisdom, his innocence, and the knowledge infused into him by God himself, could not

¹ Naturalists tell us the serpent casts its skin. Did Satan creep into the skin of one?

prevent himself from falling into the temptation of a demon.

Hence, in every shift, the priests invariably make God the author of sin. It was God who tempted Lucifer before the creation of the world; Lucifer, in his turn, became the tempter of man, and the cause of all the evil our race suffers. It appears, therefore, that God created both angels and men to give them an opportunity of sinning.

It is easy to perceive the absurdity of this system, to save which the theologians have invented another still more absurd, that it might become the foundation of all their religious revelations, and by means of which they idly imagine they can fully justify the divine providence. The system of truth supposes the *free will* of man—that he is his own master, capable of doing good or ill, and of directing his own plans. At the words *free will*, I already perceive, Madam; that you tremble, and doubtless anticipate a metaphysical dissertation. Rest assured of the contrary; for I flatter myself that the question will be simplified and rendered clear, I shall not merely say for you, but for all your sex, who are not resolved to be wilfully blind.

To say that man is a free agent, say the priests, is to detract from the power of the Supreme Being, to pretend that God is not the master of his will; to encourage a weak creature to revolt against his creator, to derange his plans, to disturb the order in which he delights, to render his works useless, and thereby excite in him passions, and wrath, like what we see among ourselves. Thus, at first sight, you discover from this principle, a crowd of absurdities. If God is the friend of order, all who are his creatures ought necessarily to be inspired to maintain order; without this, the divine will ceases to have its effect. If God has his own plans, they ought always, and of necessity, to be executed; if man has the power to harass the divine mind, and to fill it with anger, man is the master of

God's happiness, and the league he has made with Satan is strong enough to dissipate the projects of the divinity. In a word, if man is free to commit sin, God is no longer omnipotent.

They reply to us, that God, without compromising his omnipotence, might give man freedom of action—that this freedom, or liberty, is a benefit by which God intends to give him the ability of meriting his goodness ; but, on the other hand, this liberty does not yield him sufficient ability to merit his hatred, by offending and encouraging others to commit crimes : from whence I conclude, that this liberty is not only a benefit, but consistent with the divine goodness. This goodness would be more real, if men had always sufficient resolution to do what is pleasing to God, conformable to order, and conducive to the happiness of their fellow-creatures. If men, in virtue of their liberty, do things contrary to the will of God, God who is supposed to have the prescience of foreseeing all, ought to have taken measures to prevent men from abusing their liberty ; if he foresaw they would sin, he ought to have given them the means of avoiding it ; if he could not prevent them from doing ill, he has consented to the ill they have done ; if he has consented, he should not be offended ; if he is offended, or if he punish them for the evil they have done with his permission, he is unjust and cruel ; if he suffer them to rush on to their destruction, he is bound afterwards to take them to himself, and he cannot with reason find fault with them for the abuse of their liberty, in being deceived or seduced, by the objects which he himself had placed in their way to seduce them, to tempt them, and to determine their wills to do evil.

What would you say of a father who should give to his children, in the infancy of age, and when they were without experience, the liberty of satisfying their disordered appetites, till they should convince themselves of their evil tendency ? Would not such a parent be in

the right, to feel uneasy at the abuse which they should make of their liberty which he had given them? Would it not be accounted malice in this parent, who should have foreseen what was to happen, not to have furnished his children with the capacity of directing their own conduct, so as to avoid the evils they might be assailed with? Would it not shew in him the height of madness, were he to punish them for the evil which he had done, and the chagrin which they occasioned him; would it not be to himself that we should ascribe the sottishness and wickedness of his children?

You see, then, the points of view under which this system of man's free-will shews us the Deity. This free-will becomes a present the most dangerous, since it puts man in the condition of doing evil that is truly frightful. We may thence conclude, that this system, far from justifying God, makes him culpable of malice, imprudence, and injustice. But this is to overturn all our ideas of a being perfectly, nay, infinitely wise and good, consenting to punish his creatures for sins which he gave them the power of committing, or, which is the same, suffering the Devil to inspire them with evil. All the subtilties of theology tend really to destroy the notions which are given us from the book of nature, of its Author. This theology is evidently the mythology of the heathens. However, our doctors have fancied they have found means to support their ruinous suppositions. You have more than once heard of *predestination* and *grace*—terrible words! which create among us disputes, at which reason would be compelled to blush, if the Christians had not come to the resolution to renounce their intellects, and which have not less fatal consequences to society. But do not you be surprised; these false and obscure principles have even among the theologians produced dissensions: and their quarrels would be indifferent, if they did not attach more importance to them than they really deserve.

But to proceed. The system of predestination sup-

poses, that God, in his eternal secrets, has resolved that some men should be elected, and, being thus his favourites, receive special grace. By this grace they are supposed to be made agreeable to God, and meet for eternal happiness. But then an infinite number of others are destined to perdition, and receive not the grace necessary to eternal salvation. These contradictory and opposite propositions make it pretty evident that the system is absurd. It makes God, a being infinitely perfect and good, a partial tyrant, who has created a vast number of human beings to be the sport of his caprice, and the victims of his vengeance. It supposes that God will punish his creatures for not having received that grace which he did not deign to give them; it presents this God to us under traits so revolting, that the theologians are forced to avow that the whole is a profound mystery, into which the human mind cannot penetrate. But if man is not made to lift his inquisitive eye on this frightful mystery, that is to say, on this astonishing absurdity, which our teachers have idly endeavoured to square to their views of Deity; or to reconcile the atrocious injustice of their God with his infinite goodness, by what right do they wish us to adore this mystery which they would compel us to believe, and to subscribe to an opinion that saps the divine goodness to its very foundation? How do they reason upon a dogma, and quarrel with acrimony, about a system of which even themselves can comprehend nothing?

The more you examine this religion, the more you will have occasion to be convinced, that the things which its teachers call mysteries, are clusters of difficulties which embarrass themselves; that when they cannot steer clear of the dilemma into which their absurdities plunge them, their false principles are resorted to; but these leave them where they found them. This phrase, *mystery*, is not suited to our comprehension; even these grave teachers themselves do not understand the things they talk of without ceasing; they

invent erroneous words to explain matters more so, and they give the name of mysteries to things they understand as little as we do.

All the religions in the world are founded on predestination ; all the revelations among mankind, as you have been already told, suppose this odious dogma which makes Providence an unjust master, who shews a blind predeliction for some of his children, to the prejudice of others. They make God a tyrant, who punishes the faults of men whom he has not created faultless, and pardons those whom he has allowed to go astray. This dogma, which has served as the basis of Paganism, is also the grand pivot of the Christian religion ; the Lord of which doth not exercise less hatred to his worshippers, than the divinities of the wickedest idolaters. With such notions, is it not astonishing that this God should appear to those who meditate on his attributes, an object sufficiently terrible to agitate the imagination, and to lead some to indulge in dangerous follies ?

The dogma of another life serves also to exculpate the Deity from these apparent injustices or aberrations, with which he might naturally be accused. It is pretended, that it has pleased him to distinguish his friends on earth, seeing he has amply provided for their future happiness in an abode prepared for their souls. But as I believe I have already hinted, these proofs that God makes some good, and leaves others wicked, either evince injustice on his part, at least temporary, or they contradict his Omnipotence. If God can do all things, if he is privy to all the thoughts and actions of men, what need has he of any proofs ? If he has resolved to give them grace necessary to save them, has he not assured them they will not perish ? If he is unjust and cruel, this God is not immutable, and belies his character ; at least, for a time he derogates from the perfections which we should expect to find in him. What would you think of a king, who, during a particular time, would discover to his favour-

ites traits the most frightful, in order that they might incur his disgrace, and who should afterwards insist on their believing him a very good and amiable man, to obtain his favour again? Would not such a prince be pronounced wicked, fanciful, and tyrannical? Nevertheless, this supposed prince might be pardoned by some, if for his own interest, and the better to assure himself of the attachment of his friends, he might give them some smiles of his favour. It is not so with God, who knows all, who can do all, who has nothing to fear from the dispositions of his creatures. From all these reasonings, we may see that the Deity, whom the priests have conjured up, plays a great game, very ridiculous, very unjust, on the supposition that he tries his servants, and that he allows them to suffer in this world, to prepare them for another. The theologians have not failed to discover motives in this conduct of God, which they can as readily justify; but these pretended motives are borrowed from the Omnipotence of this being, by his absolute power over his creatures, to whom he is not obliged to render an account of his actions; but especially in this theology, which professes to justify God, do we not see it make him a despot and tyrant more hateful than any of his creatures?

I am, &c.

LETTER V.

ALLOW me now, Madam, to proceed with you to an examination of the dogma of a future life, in which it is supposed, that the Deity, after having suffered men to be tempted with the trials and difficulties of this life; in fine, to assure himself whether they are worthy of his love or hatred, that he may bestow on them rewards or inflict on them the punishment which they deserve. This dogma, which is one of the capital

points of the Christian religion, is founded on a great many hypotheses or suppositions, which we have already glanced at, and which we have shewn to be absurd and incompatible, with the notions which the same religion gives us of the Deity. In effect, it supposes us capable of offending or pleasing the Author of Nature, of influencing his humour, or exciting his passions; afflicting, tormenting, resisting, and thwarting the plans of Deity. It supposes, moreover, the free-will of man, a system which we have seen incompatible with the goodness, justice, and omnipotence of the Deity. It supposes, further, that God has occasion of proving his creatures, and making them, if I may so speak, pass a noviciate to know what they are worth when he shall square accounts with them. It supposes in God, who has created men for happiness only, the inability to put, by one grand effort, all men in the road, whence they may infallibly arrive at permanent felicity. It supposes that man will survive himself, or that the same being after death, will continue to think, to feel, and act as he did in this life. In a word, it supposes the immortality of the soul; an opinion unknown to the Jewish law-giver, who is totally silent on this topic to the people to whom God had manifested himself; an opinion which even in the time of Jesus Christ one sect at Jerusalem admitted, while another sect rejected; an opinion about which the Messiah, who came to instruct them, deigned to fix the ideas of those who might deceive themselves, in this respect; an opinion which appears to have been engendered in Egypt, or in India, anterior to the Jewish religion, but which was unknown among the Hebrews, till they took occasion to instruct themselves in the Pagan philosophy of the Greeks, and the doctrines of Plato.

Whatever might be the origin of this doctrine, it was eagerly adopted by the Christians, who judged it very convenient to their system of religion, all the parts of which are founded on the marvellous, and

which made it a crime to admit any truths agreeable to reason and common sense. Thus, without going back to the inventors of this inconceivable dogma, let us examine dispassionately what this opinion really is; let us endeavour to penetrate to the principles on which it is supported; let us adopt it, if we shall find it an idea conformable to reason; let us reject it, if it shall appear destitute of proof, and at variance with common sense, even though it had been received as an established truth in all antiquity, though it may have been adopted by many millions of mankind.

Those who maintain the opinion of the soul's immortality regard it, that is, the soul, as a being distinct from the body, as a substance, or essence, totally different from the corporeal frame, and they designate it by the name of *spirit*. If we ask them what a spirit is, they tell us it is not matter; and if we ask them what they understand by that which is not matter, which is the only thing of which we cannot form an idea, they tell us it is a spirit. In general, it is easy to see that men the most savage, as well as the most subtle thinkers, make use of the word *spirit* to designate all the causes of which they cannot form clear notions; hence the word spirit hath been used to designate a being of which none can form any idea.

Notwithstanding, the divines pretend, that this unknown being, entirely different from the body, of a substance which has nothing conformable with itself, is, nevertheless, capable of setting the body in motion; and this, doubtless, is a mystery very inconceivable. We have noticed the alliance between this spiritual substance and the material body, whose functions it regulates. As the divines have supposed that matter could neither think, nor will, nor perceive, they have believed that it might conceive much better those operations attributed to a being of which they had ideas less clear than they can form of matter. In consequence, they have imagined many gratuitous suppositions to explain the union of the soul with the

body. In fine, in the impossibility of overcoming the insurmountable barriers which oppose them, the priests have made man twofold, by supposing that he contains something distinct from himself; they have cut through all difficulties by saying that this union is a great mystery which man cannot understand; and they have everlasting recourse to the omnipotence of God, to his supreme will, to the miracles which he has always wrought; and those last are never-failing, final resources, which the theologians reserve for every case wherein they can find no other mode of escaping gracefully from the argument of their adversaries.

You see, then, to what we reduce all the jargon of the metaphysicians, all the profound reveries which for so many ages have been so industriously hawked about in defence of the soul of man; an immaterial substance, of which no living being can form an idea; a spirit, that is to say, a being totally different from any thing we know. All the theological verbiage ends here, by telling us, in a round of pompous terms, fooleries that impose on the ignorant—that we do not know what essence the soul is of; but we call it a spirit because of its nature, and because we feel ourselves agitated by some unknown agent; we cannot comprehend the mechanism of the soul; yet can we feel ourselves moved, as it were, by an effect of the power of God, whose essence is far removed from ours, and more concealed from us than the human soul itself. By the aid of this language, from which you cannot possibly learn any thing, you will be as wise, Madam, as all the theologians in the world!

If you would desire to form ideas the most precise of yourself, banish from you the prejudices of a vain theology, which only consists in repeating words without attaching any new ideas to them, and which are insufficient to distinguish the soul from the body, which appear only capable of multiplying beings without reason, of rendering more incomprehensible, and more obscure, notions less distinct than we already have of

ourselves. These notions should be at least the most simple, and the most exact, if we consult our nature, experience, and reason. They prove that man knows nothing but by his material sensible organs, that he sees only by his eyes, that he feels by his touch, that he hears by his ears; and that when either of those organs is actually deranged, or has been previously wanting or imperfect, man can have none of the ideas that organ is capable of furnishing him with, neither thoughts, memory, reflection, judgment, desire, or will. Experience shews us, that corporeal and material beings, are alone capable of being moved and acted upon; and that without those organs we have enumerated, the soul thinks not, feels not, wills not, nor is moved. Every thing shews us that the soul undergoes always the same vicissitudes as the body; it grows to maturity, gains strength, becomes weak, and puts on old age like the body; in fine, every thing we can understand of it, goes to prove that it perishes with the body; at least, we want proofs to convince us, how that which sees, feels, tastes, smells, and hears, by means of the organs of sight, touch, taste, smell, and hearing, shall exist when the organs that communicate these sensations to it are levelled with the dust. In short, the soul seems to exist only through the bodily organs; destroy them; kill the body; the soul will be incapable of feeling, of sensibility.

Every thing we hear about the soul, conspires to prove it is the same with our body, connected relatively to some one or other of its faculties, less visibly to our understanding, than it may be to beings of a superior nature. Every thing serves to convince us, that without the body the soul is nothing, and that all the operations which are attributed to the soul cannot be exercised any longer when the body is destroyed. Our body is a machine, which so long as we live, is susceptible of producing the effects which have been designated under different names, one from another; sentiment is one of these effects, thought is another,

reflection a third. This last passes sometimes by other names, and our brain appears to be the seat of all our organs : it is that which is the most susceptible. This organic machine, once destroyed or deranged, is no longer capable of producing the same effects, or of exercising the same functions. It is with our body, as it is with a watch which indicates the hours, and which goes not if the spring or a pinion be broken.

Cease, Eugenia, cease to torment yourself about the fate which shall attend you when death will have separated you from all that is dear on earth. After the dissolution of this life, the soul shall cease to exist ; those devouring flames with which you have been threatened by the priests, will have no effect upon the soul, which can neither be susceptible then of pleasures or pains, of agreeable or sorrowful ideas, of lively or doleful reflections.

It is only by means of the bodily organs that we feel, think, and are merry or sad, happy or miserable ; this body once reduced to dust, we will neither have perceptions nor sensations, and, by consequence, neither memory nor ideas ; the dispersed particles will no longer have the same qualities they possessed when united ; nor will they any longer conspire to produce the same effects. In a word, the body being destroyed, the soul, which is merely a result of all the parts of the body in action, will cease to be what it is ; it will be reduced to nothing with the life's breath.

Our teachers pretend to understand the soul well, they profess to be able to distinguish it from the body ; in short, they can do nothing without it ; and therefore to keep up the farce, they have been compelled to admit the ridiculous dogma of the Persians, known by the name of the *resurrection*. This system supposes, that the particles of the body which have been scattered at death, will be collected at the last day to be replaced in their primitive condition. But that this strange phenomenon may take place, it is necessary that the particles of our destroyed bodies, of which

some have been converted into earth, others have passed into plants, others into animals, some of one species, others of another, even of our own; it is requisite, I say, that these particles, of which some have been mixed with the waters of the deep, others have been carried on the wings of the wind; it is requisite that these particles, some of which have belonged at one time to one person, at another to another; particles which have nourished the grass of a church-yard, on which a sheep, or an ox, or a goose has fed, and on which sheep, or ox, or goose, the pampered priest has afterwards fed, till he again became food for his successor, and so on; it is necessary that these particles, so evanescent in name, so common to so many different individuals, of so many different species of animals, or even of vegetables, should be reunited to reproduce the individual to whom they formerly belonged. If you cannot get over this impossibility, the theologians will explain it to you by saying, very briefly, "Ah! it is a profound mystery, which we cannot comprehend." They will inform you, that the resurrection is a miracle, a supernatural effect, which is to result from the divine power. It is thus they overcome all the difficulties which the good sense of a few opposes to their rhapsodies.

If, perchance, Madam, you do not wish to remain content with these sublime reasons, against which your good sense will naturally revolt, the parsons, who have left no stone unturned that they might seduce the imagination of mankind by vague pictures of the ineffable pleasures to be enjoyed in Paradise by the bodies and souls of those who have been predestinated, will warn you against refusing to credit on their word, without examination, what they proclaim, as if they had journeyed into the other world, and returned fraught with its secrets; nay, they will bid you, at your peril, refuse to disbelieve the jargon of nonsense which they thunder forth, and which they say, if you do not believe, God will heap on you his eternal in-

dignation! Thus they alarm your imagination by horrifying pictures of the eternal cruelties of God, and torments of man; as if a beneficent Being had prepared a host of creatures to suffer so much and so long for his mirth or madness.

But if you consider the thing coolly, you will perceive the futility of their flattering promises, and of their puny threatenings, which are uttered merely to catch the unwary. You may easily discover, that if it could be true, that man shall survive himself, God, in recompensing him, would only recompense himself for the grace which he had granted; and when he punishes him, he punishes him for not receiving the grace which he had hardened him against receiving. This line of conduct, so cruel and barbarous, appears equally unworthy of a wise God as it is of a being perfectly good.

If your mind, proof against the terrors with which the Christian religion penetrates its sectaries, is capable of contemplating these frightful circumstances, which it is imagined will accompany the punishments which God has destined for the victims of his vengeance, you will find that they are impossible and totally incompatible with all the ideas which we can form of the Divinity. In a word, you will perceive, that the chastisements of another life are but a crowd of chimeras, invented to disturb human reason, to subjugate it beneath the feet of imposture, to annihilate for ever the repose of slaves, whom the priesthood would enthrall and retain under its yoke.

In short, Eugenia, the priests would make you believe that these torments will be horrible, a thing which accords not with our ideas of God's goodness; they tell you they will be eternal, a thing which accords not with our ideas of the justice of God, who, one would very naturally suppose, will proportion chastisements to faults, and who, by consequence, will not punish without end, the beings whose actions are bounded by time. They tell us, that the offences

against God are infinite, and, by consequence, that the Divinity, without doing violence to his justice, may avenge himself as God, that is to say, avenge himself to infinity. In this case, I shall say, that this God is not good; that he is vindictive, a character which always announces fear and weakness. In fine, I shall say, that among the imperfect beings who compose the human species, there is not, perhaps, a single one who, without some advantage to himself, without personal fear, in a word, without folly, would consent to punish everlastingly, the wretch who might have the misfortune to offend him, but who no longer had either the ability or the inclination to commit another offence. Caligula found, at least, some little amusement to forsake for a time the cares of government, and enjoy the spectacle of punishment which he inflicted on those unfortunate men whom he had an interest in destroying. But what advantage can it be to God to heap on the damned everlasting torments? Will this amuse him? Will their frightful punishments correct their faults? Can these examples of the divine severity be of any service to those on earth, who witness not their friends in hell? Will it not be the most astonishing of all the miracles of Deity, to make the bodies of the damned invulnerable—to resist, through the ceaseless ages of eternity, the frightful torments destined for them?

You see then, Madam, that the ideas which the priests give us of hell, make of God a being infinitely more insensible, more wicked and cruel than the most barbarous of men. They add to all this, that it will be the Devil and the apostate angels, that is to say, the enemies of God, whom he will employ as the ministers of his implacable vengeance. These wicked spirits, then, will execute the commands which this severe judge will pronounce against men at the last judgment. For you must know, Madam, that a God, who knows all, will at some future time take an account of what he already knows. So then, not content with judging

men at death, he will assemble the whole human race with great pomp at the last or general judgment, in which he will confirm his sentence in the view of the whole human race, assembled to receive their doom. Thus, on the wreck of the world, will he pronounce a definitive judgment, from which there will be no appeal.

But in attending this memorable judgment, what will become of the souls of men, separated from their bodies, which have not yet been resuscitated? The souls of the just will go directly to enjoy the blessings of Paradise; but what is to become of the immense crowd of souls imbued with faults or crimes, and on whom the infallible parsons, who are so well instructed in what is passing in another world, cannot speak with certainty as to their fate? According to some of these wise-acres, God will place the souls of such as are not wholly displeasing to him, in a place of punishment, where by rigorous torments they shall have the merit of expiating the faults with which they may stand chargeable at death. According to this fine system, so profitable to our spiritual guides, God has found it the most simple method to build a fiery furnace for the special purpose of tormenting a certain proportion of souls who have not been sufficiently purified at death to enter Paradise, but who, after leaving them some years united with the body, and giving them time necessary to arrive at that amendment of life, by which they may become partakers of the supreme felicity of Heaven, ordains that they shall expiate their offences in torment. It is on this ridiculous notion that our priests have bottomed the doctrine of *purgatory*, which every good Catholic is obliged to believe for the benefit of the priests, who reserve to themselves, as is very reasonable, the power of compelling by their prayers a just and immutable God to relax in his sternness, and liberate the captive souls, which he had only condemned to undergo this purgation, in order that they might be made meet for the joys of Paradise.

With respect to the Protestants who are, as every one

knows, heretics and impious, you will observe that they pretend not to those lucrative views of the Roman doctors. On the contrary, they think that, at the instant of death, every man is irrevocably judged ; that he goes directly to glory, or into a place of punishment, to suffer the award of evil by the enduring of punishments for which God had eternally prepared both the sufferer and his torments ! Even before the re-union of soul and body, at the final judgment, they fancy that the soul of the wicked, (which on the principle of all souls being *spirits* must be the same in essence as the soul of the elect,) will, though deprived of those organs by which it felt and thought and acted, be capable of undergoing the agency or action of a fire ! It is true that some Protestant theologians tell us, that the fire of hell is a spiritual fire, and by consequence very different from the material fire vomited out of Vesuvius, and *Ætna*, and *Hecla*. Nor ought we to doubt that these informed doctors of the Protestant faith know very well what they say, and that they have as precise and clear ideas of a spiritual fire as they have of the ineffable joys of paradise, which may be as spiritual as the punishment of the damned in hell.

Such are, Madam, in a few words the absurdities, not less revolting than ridiculous, which the dogmas of a future life and of the immortality of the soul have engendered in the minds of men. Such are the phantoms which have been invented and propagated, to seduce and alarm mortals, to excite their hopes and their fears ; such the illusions that so powerfully operate on weak and feeling beings. But lest these gloomy ideas should have too much influence in depressing the imagination, and banishing from it the agreeable thoughts which the variegated scenes of life so naturally and so frequently furnish us with, the priests have always insisted more forcibly on what men have to fear on the part of a terrible God, than on what they have to hope from the mercy of a forgiving Deity, full of goodness. Princes the most wicked are infinitely

more respected than those who are famed for indulgence and humanity. The priests have had the art to throw us into uncertainty and mistrust by the twofold character which they have given the divinity. If they promise us salvation, they tell us that we must work it out for ourselves, "with fear and trembling." It is thus that they have contrived to inspire the minds of the most honest men with dismay and doubt, repeating without ceasing, that time only must disclose who are worthy of the divine love, or who are to be the objects of the divine wrath. Terror has been, and always will be the most certain means of corrupting and enslaving the mind of man.

They will tell us, doubtless, that the terrors which religion inspires, are salutary terrors; that the dogma of another life is a bridle sufficiently powerful to prevent the commission of crimes, and restrain men within the path of duty. To undeceive one's self of this maxim, so often thundered in our ears, and so generally adopted on the authority of the priests, we have only to open our eyes. Nevertheless, we see some Christians thoroughly persuaded of another life, who, notwithstanding, conduct themselves as if they had nothing to fear on the part of a God of vengeance, nor any thing to hope from a God of mercy. When any of these are engaged in some great project, at all times that they are tempted by some strong passion, or by some bad habit, they shut their eyes on another life, they see not the enraged judge, they suffer themselves to sin, and when it is committed, they comfort themselves by saying, that God is good. Besides, they console themselves by the same contradictory religion which shews them also this same God, whom it represents so susceptible of wrath, as full of mercy, bestowing his grace on all those who are sensible of their evils and repent. In a word, I see none whom the fears of hell will restrain, when passion or interest solicit obedience. The very priests, who make so many efforts to convince us of their dogmas, too often evince

more wickedness of conduct than we find in those who have never heard one word about another life. Those who from infancy have been taught these terrifying lessons are neither less debauched, nor less proud, nor less passionate, nor less unjust, nor less avaricious than others, who have lived and died ignorant of Christian purgatory and Paradise. In fine, the dogma of another life has little or no influence on them; it annihilates none of their passions; it is a bridle merely with some few timid souls, who, without its knowledge, would never have the hardihood to be guilty of any great excesses. This dogma is very fit to disturb the quiet of some honest, timorous persons, and the credulous, whose imagination it inflames, without ever staying the hand of great rogues, without imposing on them more than the decency of civilization, and a specious morality of life, restrained chiefly by the coercion of public laws.

In short, to sum all up in one thought, I behold a religion gloomy and formidable to make impressions very lively, very deep, and very dangerous on a mind such as yours, although it makes but very momentary impressions on the mind of such as are hardened in crime, or whose dissipation destroys constantly the effects of its threats. More lively affected than others by your principles, you have been but too often and too seriously occupied for your happiness, by gloomy and harassing objects, which have powerfully affected your sensible imagination, though the same phantoms that have pursued you have been altogether banished from the mind of those who have had neither your virtues, your understanding, nor your sensibility.

According to his principles, a Christian must always live in fear; he can never know with certainty whether he pleases or displeases God; the least movement of pride, or of covetousness, the least desire will suffice to merit the divine anger, and lose, in one moment, the fruits of years of devotion. It is not surprising, that with these frightful principles before them,

many Christians should endeavour to find in solitude, employment for their lugubrious reflections, where they may avoid the occasions that solicit them to do wrong, and embrace such means as are most likely, according to their notions of the likelihood of the thing, to expiate the faults which they fancy might incur the eternal vengeance of God.

Thus the dark notions of a future life, leave those only in peace who think notoriously upon it ; they are very disconsolate to all those whose temperament determines them to contemplate it. They are but the atrocious ideas, however, which the priests study to give us of the Deity, and by which they have compelled so many worthy people to throw themselves into the arms of incredulity. If some libertines, incapable of reasoning, abjure a religion troublesome to their passions, or which abridges their pleasures, there are very many who have maturely examined it, that have been disgusted with it, because they could not consent to live in the fears it engendered, nor to nourish the despair it created. They have then abjured this religion, fit only to fill the soul with inquietudes, that they might find in the bosom of reason the repose which it ensures to good sense.

Times of the greatest crimes are always times of the greatest ignorance. It is in these times, or usually so, that the greatest noise is made about religion. Men then follow mechanically, and without examination, the tenets which their priests impose on them, without ever diving to the bottom of their doctrines. In proportion as mankind become enlightened, great crimes become more rare, the manners of men are more polished, the sciences are cultivated, and the religion which they have coolly and carefully examined, loses sensibly its credit. It is thus that we now see so many incredulous people in the bosom of society become more agreeable and complacent now than formerly, when they were governed by the caprice of a priest who crammed them with difficulties,

which himself for a small sum could go through with God, and thus secure for the credulous the hope of Heaven. The deeper the purse of the votary, the surer was Heaven to him at death; the more the priest felt of the gold, the more apparent was Paradise to the giver of the "filthy lucre."

Religion is consoling only to those who have no embarrassment about it; the indefinite and vague recompence which it promises, without giving ideas of it, is made to deceive those who make no reflections on the impatient, variable, false, and cruel character which this religion gives of its God. But how can it make any promises on the part of a God whom it represents as a tempter, a seducer, who appears, moreover, to take pleasure in laying the most dangerous snares for his weak creatures? How can it reckon on the favours of a God full of caprice, whom it alternately informs us is replete with tenderness or with hatred? By what right does it hold out to us the rewards of a despotic and tyrannical God, who does or does not choose men for happiness, and who consults only his own fantasy to destine some of his creatures to bliss and others to perdition? Nothing, doubtless, but the blindest enthusiasm could induce mortals to place confidence in such a God as the priests have feigned; it is to folly alone we must attribute the love some well-meaning people profess to the God of the parsons; it is matchless extravagance alone that could prevail on men to reckon on the unknown rewards which are promised them by this religion, at the same time that it assures us, that God is the author of grace, but that we have no right to expect any thing from him.

In a word, Madam, the notions of another life, far from consoling, are fit only to embitter all the sweets of the present life. After the sad and gloomy ideas which Christianity, always at variance with itself, presents us with of its God, it then affirms, that we are much more likely to incur his terrible chastisements, than possessed of power by which we may merit inef-

fable rewards; and it proceeds to inform us, that God will give grace to whomsoever he pleases, yet it remains with themselves whether they escape damnation; and a life the most spotless cannot warrant them to presume that they are worthy of his favour. In good truth, would not total annihilation be preferable to such beings rather than falling into the hands of a Deity so hard-hearted? Would not every man of sense prefer the idea of complete annihilation to that of a future existence, in order to be the sport of the eternal caprice of a Deity, so cruel as to damn and torment, without end, the unfortunate beings whom he created so weak, that he might punish them for faults inseparable from their nature? If God is good, as we are assured, notwithstanding the cruelties of, which the priests suppose him capable, is it not more consonant to all our ideas of a being perfectly good, to believe that he did not create them to sport with them in a state of eternal damnation, which they had not the power of choosing, or of rejecting and shunning? Has not the God whom the theologians have conjured up, treated the beasts of the field more favourably than he has treated man, since he has exempted them from sin, and by consequence has not exposed them to suffer an eternal unhappiness?

The dogma of the immortality of the soul, or of a future life, presents nothing consoling in the Christian religion. On the contrary, it was calculated expressly to fill the heart of the Christian, following out his principles, with bitterness and continual alarm. I appeal to yourself, Madam, whether these sublime notions have any thing consoling in them? Whenever this uncertain idea has presented itself to your mind, has it not filled you with a cold and secret horror?

The consciousness of a life so virtuous and so spotless, should doubtless be capable of securing you against those fears which the priests throw around your sex. Doubtless it does so, else are you not inspired with the idea of a being jealous, severe, capricious,

whose eternal disgrace the highest fault is sure of incurring, and in whose eyes the smallest weakness, or freedom the most involuntary, is sufficient to cancel years of strict observance of all the rules of propriety and religion?

I know very well what you will advance to support yourself in your prejudices. The ministers of religion possess the secret of tempering the alarms which they have the art to excite. They strive to inspire confidence in those minds which they discover accessible to fear. They balance, thus, one passion against another. They hold in suspense the mind of their slaves, in the apprehension that too much confidence would only render them less pliable, or that despair would force them to throw off the yoke. To persons terribly frightened about their state after death, they speak only of the hopes which we may entertain of the goodness of God. To those who have too much confidence, they preach up the terrors of the Lord, and the judgments of a severe God. By this chicanery they contrive, like wily politicians, to keep under their yoke the pliable and the obstinate; all those who are weak enough to be led by the contradictory doctrines of these blind guides.

They tell you, besides, that the sentiment of the immortality of the soul is inherent in man; that the soul is consumed by boundless desires, and that since there is nothing on this earth capable of satisfying it; these are indubitable proofs that it is destined to subsist eternally. In a word, that as we naturally desire to exist always, we may naturally conclude that we shall always exist. But what think you, Madam, of such reasonings? To what do they lead? Do we desire the continuation of this existence, because it may be blessed and happy, or because we know not what may become of us? But we cannot desire a miserable existence, or, at least, one in which it is more than probable we may be miserable rather than happy. If, as the Christian religion so often repeats, the number of

the elect is very small, and salvation very difficult, the number of the reprobate very great, and damnation very easily obtained, who is he who would desire to exist always with so evident a risk of being eternally damned? Would it not have been better for us not to have been born, than to be compelled against our nature to play a game so fraught with peril? Does not annihilation itself present to us an idea preferable to that of an existence which may very easily lead us to eternal tortures? Suffer me, Madam, to appeal to yourself. If before you had come into this world, you had had your choice of being born, or of not seeing the light of this fair sun, you could have been made to comprehend, but for one moment, the hundred thousandth part of the risks you run to be eternally unhappy, would you not have determined never to enjoy life?

It is an easy matter, then, to perceive the proofs on which the priests pretend to found this dogma of the immortality of the soul and a future life. The desire which we might have of it could only be founded on the hope of enjoying eternal happiness. But does religion give us this assurance? Yes, say the clergy, if you submit faithfully to the rules it prescribes. But to conform one's self to these rules, is it not necessary to have grace from Heaven? And are we then sure we shall obtain that grace, or if we do, merit Heaven? Do the priests not repeat to us, without ceasing, that God is the author of grace, and that he only gives it to a small number of the elect? Do they not daily tell us that, except one man, who rendered himself worthy of this eternal happiness, there are millions going the high road to damnation? It is plain, that every Christian who would so reason, would be a fool, to desire a future existence which he has so many motives to fear, or to reckon on a happiness which every thing conspires to shew him is as uncertain, as difficult to be obtained, as it is unequivocally dependent

on the fantasies of a capricious Deity, who sports with the misfortunes of his creatures.

Under every point of view in which we regard the dogma of the soul's immortality, we are compelled to consider it as a chimera invented by men who have realized their wishes, or who have not been able to justify Providence from the transitory injustices of this world. This dogma was received with avidity, because it flattered the desires, and especially the vanity of man, who arrogated to himself a superiority above all the beings that enjoy existence, and which he would pass by and reduce to mere clay; who believed himself the favourite of God, without ever taxing his attention with this other fact, that God makes him every instant experience vicissitudes, calamities, and trials, as all sentient natures experience; that God made him, in fine, to undergo death, or dissolution, which is an invariable law that all that exists must find verified. This haughty creature, who fancies himself a privileged being, alone agreeable to his Maker, does not perceive that there are stages in his life when his existence is more uncertain and much more weak than that of the other animals, or even of some inanimate things. Man is unwilling to admit, that he possesses not the strength of the lion, nor the swiftness of the stag, nor the durability of an oak, nor the solidity of marble, or metal. He believes himself the greatest favourite, the most sublime, the most noble; he believes himself superior to all other animals, because he possesses the faculties of thinking, judging, and reasoning. But his thoughts only render him more wretched than all the animals whom he supposes deprived of this faculty, or who, at least, he believes, do not enjoy it in the same degree with himself. Do not the faculties of thinking, of remembering, of foresight, too often render him unhappy by the very idea of the past, the present, and the future? Do not his passions drive him to excesses unknown to the other animals? Are his judg-

ments always reasonable and wise? Is reason too well developed in many men that the priests interdict its use as dangerous? Are mankind sufficiently advanced in knowledge to be able to overcome the prejudices and chimeras which render them unhappy during the greatest part of their lives? In fine, have the beasts some species of religious impressions, which inspire continual terrors in their breast, making them look upon some awful event, which embitters their softest pleasures, which enjoins them to torment themselves, and which threatens them with eternal damnation? No!

In truth, Madam, if you weigh in an equitable balance the pretended advantages of man above the other animals, you will soon see how evanescent is this fictitious superiority which he has arrogated to himself. We find that all the productions of nature are submitted to the same laws; that all beings are only born to die; they produce their like to destroy themselves; that all sentient beings are compelled to undergo pleasures and pains; they appear and they disappear; they are and they cease to be; they evince under one form that they will quit it to produce another. Such are the continual vicissitudes to which every thing that exists is evidently subjected, and from which man is not exempt, any more than the other beings and productions that he appropriates to his use as *lord of creation*. Even our globe itself undergoes change; the seas change their place; the mountains are gathered in heaps or levelled into plains; every thing that breathes is destroyed at last, and man alone pretends to an eternal duration.

It is unnecessary to tell me, that we degrade man when we compare him with the beasts, deprived of souls and intelligence; this is no levelling doctrine, but one which places him exactly where nature places him, but from which his vanity has unfortunately driven him. All beings are equal; under various and different forms they act differently; they are governed in their appetites and passions by laws which are invariably the same for all of the same species; every thing which

is composed of parts will be dissolved; every thing which has life, must part with it at death; all men are equally compelled to submit to this fate, they are equal at death, although during life their power, their talents, and especially their virtues establish a marked difference, which though real is only momentary. What will they be after death? They will be exactly what they were ten years before they were born.

Banish then, Eugenia, from your mind for ever the terrors which death has hitherto filled you with. It is for the wretched a safe haven against the misfortunes of this life. If it appears a cruel alternative to those who enjoy the good things of this world, why do they not console themselves with the idea of what they do actually enjoy? Let them call reason to their aid; it will calm the inquietudes of their imagination, but too greatly alarmed; it will disperse the clouds which religion spreads over their mind; it will teach them, that this death, so terrible in apprehension, is really nothing, and that it will neither be accompanied with remembrance of past pleasures, nor of sorrows now no more.

Live, then, happy and tranquil, amiable Eugenia! Preserve carefully an existence so interesting and so necessary to all those with whom you live. Allow not your health to be injured, not trouble your quiet with melancholy ideas. Without being teased by the prospect of an event which has no right to disturb your repose, cultivate virtue, which has always been your favourite, so necessary to your internal peace, and which has rendered you so dear to all those who have the happiness of being your friends! Let your rank, your credit, your riches, your talents be employed to make others happy, to support the oppressed, to succour the unfortunate, to dry up the tears of those whom you may have an opportunity of comforting! Let your mind be occupied about such agreeable and profitable employments as are likely to please you! Call in the aid of your reason to dissipate the phantoms which alarm you, to efface the prejudices which

you have imbibed in early life! In a word, comfort yourself; and remember, that in practising virtue, as you do, you cannot become an object of hatred to God; who, if he has reserved in eternity rigorous punishments for the social virtues, will be the strangest, the most cruel, and the most insensible of beings!

You demand of me, perhaps, "In destroying the idea of another world; what is to become of the remorse, these chastisements, so useful to mankind, and so well calculated to restrain them within the bounds of propriety?" I reply, that remorse will always subsist as long as we shall be capable of feeling its pangs, even when we cease to fear the distant and uncertain vengeance of the Divinity. In the commission of crimes; in allowing one's self to be the sport of passion, in injuring our species, in refusing to do them good, in stifling pity, every man; whose reason is not totally deranged, perceives clearly that he will render himself odious to others, that he ought to fear their enmity. He will blush, then, if he thinks he has rendered himself hateful and detestable in their eyes. He knows the continual need he has of their esteem and assistance. Experience proves to him, that vices the most concealed are injurious to himself. He lives in perpetual fear lest some mishap should unfold his weaknesses and secret faults. It is from all these ideas that we are to look for regret and remorse, even in those who do not believe in the chimeras of another world. With regard to those whose reason is deranged, those who are enervated by their passions, or perhaps linked to vice by the chains of habit, even with the prospect of Hell open before them, they will neither live less vicious, nor less wicked. An avenging God will never inflict on any man such a total want of reason as may make him regardless of public opinion, trample decency under foot, brave the laws, and expose himself to derision and human chastisements. Every man of sense easily understands, that in this world the esteem and affection of others are necessary

for his happiness, and that life is but a burden to those who by their vices injure themselves, and render themselves reprehensible in the eyes of society.

The true means, Madam, of living happy in this world is to do good to your fellow-creatures; labour for the happiness of your species; this is the chief virtue, at least, it is to have virtue, and with virtue you will appear agreeable to others, and be without remorse yourself to the end of life. Remorse is a feeling that should be far from your bosom; the very word conjures up fears to the simple; it is a term which the wants and desires of all those who know you will strive to keep remote from your mind, that you may always partake of that content and joy which every thing around you should create for your well-being, and multiply to your advantage as you glide through life to the bosom of nature.

I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

THE reflections, Madam, which I have already offered you in these letters ought, I conceive, to have sufficed to undeceive you, in a great measure, of the lugubrious and afflicting notions with which you have been inspired by religious prejudices. However, to fulfil the task which you have imposed on me, and to assist you in freeing yourself from the unfavourable ideas you may have imbibed from a system replete with irrelevancies and contradictions, I shall continue to examine the strange mysteries with which Christianity is adorned. They are founded on ideas so odd and so contrary to reason, that if from infancy we had not been familiarised with them, we should blush at our species in having for one instant believed and adopted them.

The Christians, scarcely content with the crowd of enigmas with which the books of the Jews are filled, have besides fancied they must add to them a great many incomprehensible mysteries, for which they have the most profound veneration. Their impenetrable obscurity appears to be a sufficient motive among them for adding these. Their priests, encouraged by their credulity, which nothing can outdo, seem to be studious to multiply the articles of their faith, and the number of inconceivable objects which they have said must be received with submission, and adored even if not understood.

The first of these mysteries is the *Trinity*, which supposes that one God, self-existent, who is a pure spirit, is, nevertheless, composed of three Divinities, which have obtained the names of *persons*. These three Gods, who are designated under the respective names of the *Father*, the *Son*, and the *Holy Ghost*, are, nevertheless, but one God only. These three persons are equal in power, in wisdom, in perfections; yet the second is subordinate to the first, in consequence of which he was compelled to become a man, and be the victim of the wrath of his Father. This is what the priests call the mystery of the *incarnation*. Notwithstanding his innocence, his perfection, his purity, the Son of God became the object of the vengeance of a just God, who is the same as the Son in question, but who would not consent to appease himself but by the death of his own Son, who is a portion of himself. The Son of God, not content with becoming man, died without having sinned, for the salvation of men who had sinned. God preferred to the punishment of imperfect beings, whom he did not choose to amend, the punishment of his only Son, full of divine perfections. The death of God became necessary to reclaim the human kind from the slavery of Satan, who without that would not have quitted his prey, and who has been found sufficiently powerful against the Omnipotent to oblige him to sacrifice his Son. This

is what the priests designate by the name of the mystery of *redemption*.

It is, unquestionably, the briefest way to shew the absurdity of these notions, to state them fairly as the priests deliver them to us. It is evident, that if there be but one God alone, there could not be three. Yet one may very easily conceive such a trifold Divinity much in the same way as Plato, who has, doubtless, had the advantage of the Christian teachers in this respect, since he fashioned the Deity under three different points of view, namely, all-powerful, all-wise, reasonable, and, in fine, as full of goodness; but in the excess of his zeal for these perfections, Plato, who persequised these three divine qualities, either himself transformed them into three real beings, or, at least, furnished the Christians with the means of their composition. It is not a difficult task to suppose, that those moral attributes may be found in one and the same God; but it is the height of folly, because such a supposition can be reasonably entertained, to fashion three different Gods; and in vain shall we be able to remedy this metaphysical polytheism by arguments to make of one *three*, and of three *one*. Besides, this reverie never entered the head of the Hebrew Legislator. The Eternal, it is true, revealed himself to Moses, but not as a threefold Deity. There is not one syllable in the Old Testament about this Trinity, although a notion so *bizarre*, so marvellous, and so little consonant with our ideas of a divine being, deserved to have been formally announced, especially as it is the foundation and corner-stone of the Christian religion, which was from all eternity an object of the divine solicitude, and on the establishment of which, if we may credit our sapient priests, God seems to have entertained serious thoughts long before the creation of the world.

Nevertheless, the second person, or the second God of the Trinity is revealed in flesh, the son of God is made man. But how could the pure Spirit who pre-

sides over the universe beget a son? How could this son, who before his incarnation was only a pure spirit, combine that ethereal essence with a material body, and envelope himself with it? How could the divine nature amalgamate itself with the imperfect nature of man, and how could an immense and infinite being as the Deity is represented, be formed in the womb of a virgin? After what manner could a pure spirit fecundate this favourite virgin? Did the Son of God enjoy in the womb of his mother, the faculties of omnipotence, or was he like other children during his infancy, weak, liable to infirmities, sickness, and intellectual imbecility, so conspicuous in the years of childhood; and if so, what, during this period, became of the divine wisdom and power? In fine, how could God suffer and die? How could a just God consent that a God exempt from all sin should endure the chastisements which are due to sinners? Why did he not appease himself without immolating a victim so precious and so innocent? What would you think of that sovereign who, in the event of his subjects rebelling against them, should forgive them all, or a select number of them, by putting to death his only and beloved son, who had not rebelled?

The priests tell us, that it was out of tenderness for the human kind that God wished to accomplish this sacrifice. But I still ask, if it would not have been more simple, more conformable to all our ideas of Deity, for God to pardon the iniquities of the human race, or to have prevented them committing transgressions, by placing them in a condition in which by their own will they should never have sinned? According to the entire system of the Christian religion, it is evident, that God did only create the world to have an opportunity of immolating his Son for the rebellious beings he might have formed and preserved immaculate. The fall of the rebellious angels had no visible end to serve but to effect and hasten the fall of Adam. It appears from this system, that God permitted the first man to sin

that he might have the pleasure of shewing his goodness in sacrificing his "only begotten son" to reclaim men from the thralldom of Satan. He entrusted to Satan as much power as might enable him to work the ruin of our race, with the view of afterwards changing the projects of the great mass of mankind, by making one God to die, and thereby, destroy the power of the devil on the earth. Now the Son of God died, according to the priests; but the power of Satan we affirm remains as great as ever—How can these things be?—

Has God succeeded in these projects to the end he proposed? Are men entirely rescued from the dominion of Satan? Are they not still the slaves of sin? Do they find themselves in the happy impossibility of kindling the divine wrath? Has the blood of the Son of God washed away the sins of the whole world? Do those who are reclaimed, those to whom he has made himself known, those who believe, offend not against heaven? Has the Deity who ought without doubt, to be perfectly satisfied with so memorable a sacrifice, remitted to them the punishment of sin? Is it not necessary to do something more for them? And since the death of his son, do we find the Christians exempt from disease and from death? Nothing of all this has happened. The measures taken from all eternity by the wisdom and prescience of a God who should find against his plans no obstacles, have been overthrown. The death of God himself has been of no utility to the world. All the divine projects, have militated against the free-will of man, but they have not destroyed the power of Satan. Man continues to sin and to die; the devil keeps possession of the field of battle: and it is for a very small number of the elect that the Deity consented to die.

You do indeed smile, Madam, at my being obliged seriously to combat such chimeras. If they have something of the marvellous in them it is quite adapted to the heads of children, not of men, and ought not to be admitted by reasonable beings. All the notions

we can form of those things must be mysterious ; yet there is no subject more demonstrable according to those whose interest it is to have it believed, though they are as incapable as ourselves to comprehend the matter. For the priests to say that they believe such absurdities is to be guilty of manifest falsehood ; because a proposition to be believed must necessarily be understood. To believe what they do not comprehend, is to adhere sottishly to the absurdities of others ; to believe things which are not comprehended by those who gossip about them, is the height of folly ; to believe blindly the mysteries of the Christian religion, is to admit contradictions of which they who declare them are not convinced. In fine, is it necessary to abandon one's reason among absurdities that have been received without examination from ancient priests, who were either the dupes of more knowing men or themselves the impostors who fabricated the tales in question.

If you ask of me, how men have not long ago been shocked by such absurd and unintelligible reveries ? I shall proceed, in my turn, to explain to you this secret of the church, this mystery of our priests. It is not necessary, in doing this, to pay any attention to those general dispositions of man, especially when he is ignorant and incapable of reasoning. All men are curious, inquisitive ; their curiosity spurs them on to inquiry, and their imagination busies itself to clothe with mystery, every thing the fancy conjures up as important to happiness. The vulgar mistake even what they have the means of knowing, or, which is the same thing, what they are least practised in, they are dazzled with ; they proclaim it, accordingly, marvellous, prodigious, extraordinary ; it is a phenomenon. They neither admire, nor respect much what is always visible to their eyes ; but whatever strikes their imagination, whatever gives scope to the mind becomes itself the fruitful source of other ideas far more extravagant. The priests have had the art to prevail on the

people to believe in their secret correspondence with the Deity ; they have been thence much respected, and in all countries their professed intercourse with an unseen Divinity, has given room for their announcement of things the most marvellous and mysterious.

Besides, the Divinity being a being whose impenetrable essence is veiled from mortal sight, it has been commonly admitted by the ignorant, that what could not be seen by mortal eye must necessarily be divine. Hence *sacred*, *mysterious*, and *divine*, are synonymous terms ; and these imposing words have sufficed to place the human race on their knees to adore what seeks not their inflated devotion.

The three mysteries which I have examined are received unanimously by all sects of Christians ; but there are others on which the theologians are not agreed. In fine, we see men, who after they have admitted, without repugnance, a certain number of absurdities, stop all of a sudden in the way, and refuse to admit more. The Christian Protestants are in this case. They reject with disdain, the mysteries for which the Church of Rome shews the greatest respect. Seeing, then, that our doctors, the most opposite to those of the Protestant, have adroitly multiplied mysteries, one is naturally led to conclude, they despaired of governing the mind of man, and commanding his purse, if there was any thing in their religion that was clear, intelligible, and natural. More mysterious than the priests of Egypt itself, they have found means to change every thing into mystery ; the very movements of the body, usages the most indifferent, ceremonies the most frivolous, have become, in the powerful hands of the priests, sublime and divine mysteries. In the Roman religion all is magic, all is prodigy, all is supernatural. In the decisions of our theologians, the side which they espouse is almost always that which is the most abhorrent to reason, the most calculated to confound and overthrow common sense. In consequence, our priests are by far the most rich, powerful,

and considerable. The continual want which we have of their aid, to obtain from Heaven that grace which it is their province to bring down for us, places us in continual dependence on those marvellous men who have received their commission to treat with the Deity, and become the ambassadors between Heaven and us.

Each of our sacraments envelopes a great mystery. They are ceremonies to which the Divinity, they say, attaches some secret virtue, by unseen views of which we can form no ideas. In *baptism*, without which no man can be saved, the water sprinkled on the head of the child washes his spiritual soul, and carries away the defilement which is a consequence of the sin committed in the person of Adam, who sinned for all men. By the mysterious virtue of this water, and of some words equally unintelligible, the infant finds itself reconciled to God, as his first father had made him guilty without his knowledge and consent. In all this, Madam, you cannot by possibility comprehend the complication of these mysteries, with which no Christian can dispense, though, assuredly, there is not one believer who knows what the virtue of the marvellous water consists in, which is necessary for his regeneration. Nor can you conceive how the supreme and equitable Governor of the universe could impute faults to those poor little children who have never been guilty of any transgressions against either the laws of God or the laws of man. Nor can you comprehend how a wise Deity can attach his favour to a futile ceremony, which, without changing the nature of the being who has derived an existence it neither commenced nor was consulted in, must, if administered in winter, be attended with serious consequences to the health of the child.

In *Confirmation*, a sacrament or ceremony, which, to have any value, ought to be administered by a bishop, the laying of the hands on the head of the young confirmant makes the Holy Spirit descend upon him, and procures the grace of God to uphold him in the faith.

You see, Madam, that the efficacy of this sacrament is unfortunately lost in my person; for, although in my youth I had been duly confirmed, I have not been preserved against smiling at this faith, nor have I been kept invulnerable in the credence of my priests and forefathers.

In the sacrament of *Penitence*, or confession, a ceremony which consists in putting a priest in possession of all one's faults, public or private, you will discover mysteries equally marvellous. In favour of this submission, to which every good Christian is necessarily obliged to submit, a priest, *himself a sinner*, charged with full powers by the Deity, pardons and remits in His name the sins against which God is enraged. God reconciles himself with every man who humbles himself before the priest, and by means of this ambassador, the unfortunate sinner scales the battlements of heaven again, from which his crimes had excluded him. If this sacrament doth not always procure grace very distinguishing to those who use it, it has, at all events, the advantage of rendering them pliable to the clergy, who, by its means, find an easy sway in their spiritual empire over the human mind, an empire that enables them not unfrequently to disturb society, and more often the repose of families and the very conscience of the person confessing.

There is among the Catholics another sacrament, which contains the most strange mysteries. It is that of the *Eucharist*. Our teachers, under pain of being damned, enjoin us to believe that the Son of God is compelled by a priest to quit the abodes of glory, and to come and masquerade himself under the appearance of bread! This bread becomes forthwith the body of God—This God multiplies himself in all places, and at all times when and where the priests scattered over the face of the earth, find it necessary to command his presence in the shape of bread—yet we see only one and the same God, who receives the homage and adoration of all those good people, who find it very ridicu-

lous in the Egyptians to adore lupins and onions. But the Catholics are not simply content with worshipping a bit of bread, which they consider by the conjurations of a priest as divine; they eat this bread and then persuade themselves that they are nourished by the body, or substance of God himself. The Protestants, it is true, do not admit a mystery so very odd; and regard those who do, as real idolaters. What then? This marvellous dogma is, without doubt, of the greatest utility to the priests. In the eyes of those who admit it, they become very important gentlemen, who have the power of disposing of the Deity, whom they make to descend between their hands; and thus, a Catholic priest is in fact, the creator of his God!

There is also *Extreme Unction*, a sacrament which consists in anointing with oil those sick persons who are about to depart into the other world; and which not only soothes their bodily pains, but also takes away the sin of their souls. If it produces these good effects, it is an invisible and mysterious method of manifesting obvious results; for we frequently behold sick persons have their fears of death allayed, though the operation may but too often accelerate their dissolution. But our priests are so full of charity, and they interest themselves so greatly in the salvation of souls, that they like rather to risk their own health beside the sick-bed of persons afflicted with the most contagious diseases, than lose the opportunity of administering their salutary ointment.

Ordination, is another very mysterious ceremony, by which the Deity secretly bestows his invisible grace on those whom he has selected to fill the office of the holy priesthood. According to the Catholic religion God gives to the priests the power of making God himself, as we have shewn above, a privilege which without doubt, cannot be sufficiently admired. With respect to the sensible effects of this sacrament, and of the visible grace which it confers, they are enabled by the help of some words and certain ceremonies, to

change a profane man into one that is sacred ; that is to say, who is not profane any longer. By this spiritual metamorphosis, this man becomes capable of enjoying considerable revenues without being obliged to do any thing useful for society. On the contrary, heaven itself confers on him the right of deceiving, of annoying, and of pillaging the profane citizens, who labour for his ease and luxury.

Finally, *marriage* is a sacrament that confers on the pair thus yoked, mysterious and invisible grace, of which you and I, Eugenia, have yet to acquire precise ideas. Protestants and infidels, who look upon marriage as a civil contract, and not as a sacrament, receive neither more nor less of its visible grace than the good Catholics. The former see not that those who are married enjoy by this sacrament any secret virtue, whence they may become more constant and faithful to the engagements they have contracted. And I believe both you and I, Madam, have heard of Catholics who, after marriage, have detested each other as cordially as any Protestants or infidels, ever detested their wives.

I will not now enter upon the consideration of a multitude of other magic ceremonies, admitted by some Christian sectaries and rejected by others, but to which the devout, who embrace them, attach the most lofty ideas, in the firm persuasion, that God will, on that account, visit them with his invisible grace. All these ceremonies, doubtless, contain great mysteries, and the method of handling or speaking of them is exceedingly mysterious. It is thus that the water on which a priest has pronounced a few words, contained in his conjuring book, acquires the invisible virtue of chasing away wicked spirits, who are invisible to our organs of sight, smell, and touch. It is thus that the oil, on which a bishop has muttered some certain formula, becomes capable of communicating to men, and even to some inanimate substances, such as wood, stone, metals, and walls, those invisible virtues which they did

not previously possess. In fine, in all the ceremonies of the church, we discover mysteries, and the vulgar, who comprehend nothing of them, are not the less disposed to admire, to be fascinated with, and to respect with a blind devotion. But soon would they cease to have this veneration for these fooleries, if they comprehended the design and end the priests have in view by enforcing their observance.

The priests of all nations have begun by being charlatans, castle-builders, diviners, and sorcerers. We find men of these characters in nations the most ignorant and savage, where they live by the ignorance and credulity of others. They are regarded by their ignorant countrymen as superior beings, endowed with supernatural gifts, favourites of the very Gods, because the uninquiring multitude see them perform things which they take to be mighty marvellous, or which the ignorant have always considered marvellous. In nations the most polished, the people are always the same; persons the most sensible are not often of the same ideas, especially on the subject of religion; and the priests, authorised by the ancient folly of the multitude, continue their old tricks, and receive universal applause.

You are not, then, to be surprised, Madam, if you still behold our pontiffs and our priests exercise their magical rites, or rear castles before the eyes of people prejudiced in favour of their ancient illusions, and who attach to these mysteries a degree of consequence, seeing they are not in a condition to comprehend the motives of the fabricators. Every thing that is mysterious has charms for the ignorant; the marvellous captivates all men; persons the most enlightened find it difficult to defend themselves against these illusions. Hence you may discover that the priests are always opiniatively attached to these rites and ceremonies of their worship; and it has never been without some violent revolution that they have been diminished or abrogated. The annihilation of a trifling ceremony

has often caused rivers of blood to flow. The people have believed themselves lost and undone when one bolder than the rest wished to innovate in matters of religion; they have fancied that they were to be deprived of inestimable advantages and invisible but saving grace, which they have supposed to be attached by the Divinity himself to some movements of the body. Priests the most adroit have overcharged religion with ceremonies, and practices, and mysteries. They fancied that all these were so many cords to bind the people to their interest, to allure them by enthusiasm, and render them necessary to their idle and luxurious existence, which is not spent without much money extracted from the hard earnings of the people, and much of that respect which is but the homage of slaves to spiritual tyrants.

You cannot any longer, I persuade myself, Madam, be made the dupe of these holy jugglers, who impose on the vulgar by their marvellous tales. You must now be convinced, that the things which I have touched upon as mysteries are profound absurdities, of which their inventors can render no reasonable account either to themselves or to others. You must now be certified, that the movements of the body, so much observed in the Catholic worship, as for example, the crossing of one's self, are ceremonies perfectly indifferent in themselves, and in which a Deity, wise and good, sees neither reverence nor worship. You must be sensible now, that a reasonable Deity cannot be flattered by such puerile ceremonies, and that the omnipotent Sovereign of all nature is exempt from such wants as the ministers of religion ascribe to him, for all our devotions suppose in him some exigency or want; that this Being, exempt from pride and vanity, is not like the princes of this earth, who exact etiquette from their subjects; that He attaches neither duty nor favour to vain ceremonies, disapproved of by reason, and repugnant to common sense. You conclude, then, that all these marvellous rites, in which our

priests announce so much mystery, and in which the people are taught to consider the whole of religion as consisting, are nothing more than puerilities, to which people of understanding ought never to submit. That they are usages calculated principally to alarm the minds of the weak, and keep in bondage those who have not the courage to throw off the yoke of priests.

I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

You now know, Madam, what you ought to attach to the mysteries and ceremonies of that religion you propose to meditate on, and adore in silence. I proceed now to examine some of those practices to which the priests tell us the Deity attaches his complaisance and his favours. In consequence of the false, sinister, contradictory, and incompatible ideas, which all revealed religions give us of the Deity, the priests have invented a crowd of unreasonable usages, but which are conformable to these erroneous notions that they have framed of this Being. God is always regarded as a man full of passion, sensible to presents, to flatteries, and marks of submission ; or rather as a fantastic and punctilious sovereign, who is very seriously angry when we neglect to shew him that respect and obeisance, which the vanity of earthly potentates exacts from their vassals.

It is after these notions so little agreeable to the Deity, that the priests have conjured up a crowd of practices and strange inventions, ridiculous, inconvenient, and often cruel ; but by which they inform us we shall merit the good favour of God, or disarm the wrath of the Universal Lord. With some all consists in prayers, offerings, and sacrifices, with which they fancy God is well pleased. They forget that a God

who is good, who knows all things, has no need to be solicited ; that a God who is the author of all things has no need to be presented with any part of his workmanship ; that a God who knows his power, has no need of either flatteries or submissions, to remind him of his grandeur, his power or his rights ; that a God who is Lord of all, has no need of offerings which belong to himself ; that a God who has no need of any thing from any created being, cannot be won by presents nor allured by the attempts of his creatures with the goods of this life, which they have received from the Divine bounty.

One is compelled to make these simple reflections, since all the religions in the world are filled with an infinite number of frivolous practices, by which men have long strove to render themselves acceptable to the Deity. The priests who are always declared to be the ministers, the favourites, the interpreters of God's will, have discovered how they might most easily profit by the errors of mankind, and the presents which they offer to the Deity. They are thence interested to enter into the false ideas of the people, and even to redouble the darkness of their mind. They have invented the means of pacifying a powerful unknown Being who disposes of their fate ; of exciting the devotion of the people, and their zeal for invisible beings, which they themselves have rendered visible. These priests have discovered that in labouring for the Gods they have heaped up wealth for themselves. They have taken of the presents, sacrifices, and offerings of the Gods, in order to procure for the devout, the blessings they would not be worthy of, did they not evince and practice this liberality.

You thus perceive, Madam, how the priests have made common cause with the Divinity. Their policy thence obliged them to favour and increase the errors of the human kind. They talk of this ineffable Being as of an interested monarch, jealous, full of vanity, who gives that it may be restored to him again ; who

exacts continual signs of submission and respect ; who desires without ceasing, that men may reiterate their marks of respect for him ; who wishes to be solicited, who bestows no grace unless it be importuned ; in fine, who is ever disposed to be appeased and won by gifts of which his ministers receive the greatest share.

It is evident that it is on ideas that have been borrowed from the beings, and their practices that surround us, from sovereigns and their courts, that the priests have founded all their practices, their ceremonies, and the rites which we behold current in all religions established in the world. Each sect has gone on to make its God the greatest, the most awful, the most despotic, the most interested. The people acquainted simply with human opinions, and full of debasement, have adopted without examination, the inventions which the ministers of the Deity have shewn them as the fittest to obtain his favour, and soften his wrath. The priests fail not to adapt these practices, which they have invented, to their own system of religion, and personal interest ; and the ignorant and vulgar have allowed themselves to be blindly led by these guides. Habit has familiarized them with things reason would never otherwise submit to, and they go through the routine of their duties from generation to generation, from father to son, without questioning the imposture.

The infant as soon as it can be made to understand any thing, is taught mechanically to join its little hands in prayer. His tongue is forced to lisp a formula which it does not comprehend, addressed to a God which its understanding can never conceive. In the arms of its nurse it is carried into the temple, or church, where its eyes are habituated to contemplate spectacles, ceremonies, and pretended mysteries, of which even when it shall have arrived at old age, it will understand no more than it does now. If any one asks the good nurse why she takes the child thither ? Or

the parents, why they send it to church? Both she and they, candidly tell you they do so out of reverence for sacred things, and that the child may become early acquainted with its duties to its God; yet these duties are unintelligible to themselves. Should you attempt to undeceive them in regard to these recurring futilities, either they will not listen to you, or they will fly into a passion, and ask if you are going to sweep away the hope of the helpless, and expose the world to rapine and murder, rebellion and crime. These are their arguments. All men who strenuously fortify themselves in their good sense, and reason against these continual contradictions, appear ridiculous or insensible to the wise Christian, or they are reprobated by him as impious and blasphemous; for it is by this coarse appellation he designates the men who tread not the same routine with himself, and who attach not their faith to notions that will not bear the scrutiny of reason.

What horror does it not fill the Christian devotee with if you tell him that his priest is unnecessary? What would be his surprise if you were to prove to him, even on the principles of his religion, that the prayers which in his infancy he had been taught to consider as the most agreeable to his God, are unworthy and unnecessary to this Deity! For if God knows all, what need is there to remind him of the wants of his creatures whom he loves? If God is a father full of tenderness and of goodness, is it necessary to ask him to "give us day by day our daily bread?" If this God, so good, foresaw the wants of his children, and knew much better than they what they could not know of themselves, whence is it he bids them importune him to grant them their requests? If this God is immutable and wise, how can his creatures change the fixed resolution of the Deity? If this God is just and good, how can he injure us, or place us in a situation to require the use of that prayer which entreats the Deity *not to lead us into temptation.*

You see by this, Madam, that there is but a very small portion of what the Christians pretend they understand and consider absolutely necessary, that accords at all with what they tell us has been dictated by God himself. You see that the Lord's Prayer itself, contains many absurdities and ideas, totally contrary to those which every Christian ought to have of his God. If you ask a Christian why he repeats without ceasing this vain formula on which he never reflects, he can assign little other reason, than that he was taught in his infancy to clasp his hands, repeat words, the meaning of which his priest, not himself, is alone bound to understand. He may probably add, that he has ever been taught to consider this formula requisite, as it was the most sacred and the most proper to merit the favour of Heaven.

We should, without doubt, form the same judgment of many other prayers which our teachers recommend to us daily. And if we believe them, man, to please God, ought to pass a large portion of his existence in supplicating Heaven to pour down its blessings on him. But if God is good, if he cherishes his creatures, if he knows their wants, it seems superfluous to pray to him. If God changes not, he has never promised to alter his secret decrees, or, if he has, he is variable in his fancies, like man : to what purpose are all our petitions to him ? If God is offended with us, will he not reject prayers which insult his goodness, his justice, and infinite wisdom ?

What motives, then, have our priests to inculcate constantly the necessity of prayer ? It is, that they may thereby hold the minds of mankind in opinions more advantageous to themselves. They represent God to us under the traits of a monarch difficult of access, who cannot be easily pacified, but of whom they are the ministers, the favourites, and servants. They become intercessors between this invisible Sovereign and his subjects of this nether world. They sell to the ignorant, their intercession with the All-

powerful; they pray for the people, and by society, they are recompensed with real advantages; with riches, honours, and ease. It is on the necessity of prayer that our priests, our monks, and all religious men establish their lazy existence; that they profess to win a place in heaven for their followers and paymasters, who, without this intercession, could neither obtain the favour of God, nor avert his chastisements and the calamities the world is so often visited with. The prayers of the priests are regarded as an universal remedy for all evils. All the misfortunes of nations are laid before these spiritual guides, who find public calamities a source of profit to themselves, as it is then they are amply paid for their supposed mediation between the Deity and his suffering creatures. They never teach the people that these things spring from the course of nature and of laws they cannot controul. Oh! no. They make the world believe they are the judgments of an angry God. The evils for which they can find no remedy are pronounced marks of the divine wrath, they are supernatural, and the priests must be applied to. God, whom they call so good, appears sometimes obstinately deaf to their entreaties. Their common Parent, so tender, appears to derange the order of nature to manifest his anger. The God who is so just, sometimes punishes men who cannot divine the cause of his vengeance. Then, in their distress they flee to the priests, who never fail to find motives for the divine wrath. They tell them, that God has been offended; that he has been neglected; that he requires prayers, offerings, and sacrifices. They pretend, also, that he is appeased when his ministers supplicate him. Without this intercession, they announce to the vulgar, that their harvests will fail; that their fields will be inundated; that pestilence, famine, war, and contagion will visit the earth; and when these misfortunes have arrived, they declare they may be removed by means of prayers.

Should fear and terror, allow the poor to reason,

they will discover that all the evils they are afflicted with, as well as all the good things of this life they have enjoyed, are necessary consequences of the order of nature. They will easily discover that a wise God, immutable in his conduct, cannot allow any thing to transpire but according to those laws of which he is the author. They will discover that the calamities, sterility, maladies, contagions, and even death itself are effects as necessary as happiness, abundance, health, and life itself. They will find that wars, wants, and famine, are often the effects of human imprudence. We must submit to accidents which we cannot prevent, and we must bear up under those we could not foresee, with the same equanimity we would share good fortune that we had anticipated. Opinions that are unsophisticated and accordant to nature, stand in no need of such remedies as are not within our reach. If they are above that, in vain shall we strive by an age of prayer to surmount them. Experience proves that men profit by exertion, manual or mental, rather than by the illusions of priestcraft, and the adoration of incomprehensible nummeries. Would that all men were stripped of their religious prejudices, to see the question in this light !

Nor ought we to set value on the prayers of our priests, from this consideration. We discover the inefficacy of their prayers, and the futility of their practices, from the little effect which all these have on their own conduct ; yet these are the men who put the human race on their knees. They compel their votaries always to run down those who discredit their pretensions. They terrify the weak minded by frightful ideas which they hold out to them of the Deity. They forbid them to reason ; they make them deaf to reason, by conforming them to ordinances the most out of the way, the most unreasonable, and the most contradictory to the very principles on which they pretend to establish them. They change practices, arbitrary in themselves, or, at most, indifferent and use-

less, into important duties, which they proclaim the most essential of all duties, and the most sacred and moral. They know that man ceases to reason in proportion as he suffers, or is wretched. Hence, if he experiences real misfortunes, the priests make sure of him; if he is not unfortunate they menace him; they create imaginary fears and troubles.

In fine, Madam, when you wish to examine with your own eyes, and not by the help of the pretensions set up and imposed on you by the ministers of religion, you will be compelled to acknowledge the things we have been considering, as useful to the priests alone, they are useless to the Deity, and to society they are often very obviously pernicious. Of what utility can it be in any family, to behold an excess of devotion in the mother of that family. One would suppose it is not necessary for a lady to pass all her time in prayers, and in meditations, to the neglect of other duties. Much less is it the part of a Catholic mother to be closetted in mystic conversation with her priest. Will her husband, her children, and her friends, applaud her who loses most of her time in prayers and meditations, and practices, which can tend only to render her sour, unhappy, and discontented? Would it not be much better, that a father, or a mother of a family, should be occupied with what belonged to their domestic affairs, than to spend their time in masses, in hearing sermons, in meditating on mysterious and unintelligible dogmas, or boasting about exercises of piety that tend to nothing?

Madam, do you not find, in the country you inhabit, a great many devotees who are sunk in debt, whose fortune is squandered away on priests, and who are incapable of retrieving it? Content to put their conscience to rights on religious matters, they neither trouble themselves about the education of their children nor the arrangement of their fortune, nor the discharge of their debts. Such men as would be thrown into despair did they omit one mass, will consent to

leave their creditors without their money, ruined by their negligence as much as by their principles. In truth, Madam, on what side soever you survey this religion, you will not find it good for much.

What shall we say of those fêtes which are so multiplied amongst us? Are they not evidently pernicious to society? Are not all days the same to the Eternal? Are there *gala* days in heaven? Can God be honoured by the business of an artisan or a merchant, who, in place of earning bread on which his family may subsist, squanders away his time in the church, and afterwards goes to spend his money in the public-house? It is necessary, the priests will tell you, for man to have repose. But will he not seek repose when he is fatigued by the labour of his hands? Is it not more necessary that every man should labour in his vocation than go to a temple to chant over a service which benefits only the priests, or hear a sermon of which he can understand nothing? And do not such as find great scruple in doing a necessary labour on Sunday, frequently sit down and get drunk on that day, consuming in a few hours the receipts of their week's labour? But it is for the interest of the clergy that all other shops should be shut when their's are open. We may thence easily discover why fêtes are necessary.

Is it not contrary to all the notions which we can form of the goodness and wisdom of the Divinity, that religion should form into duties both abstinence and privations; or that penitences and austerities, should be the sole proofs of virtue? What would be said of a father who should place his children at a table loaded with the fruits of the earth, but who nevertheless, should debar them from touching certain of them, though both nature and reason, dictated their use and nutriment? Can we then suppose, that a Deity wise and good, interdicts to his creatures the enjoyment of innocent pleasures which may contribute to render life agreeable, or, that a God, who has created all things,

ever objects the most desirable to the nourishment and health of man, should nevertheless forbid him their use? The Christian religion appears to doom its votaries to the punishment of Tantalus. The most part of the superstitions in the world have made of God a capricious and jealous sovereign, who amuses himself by tempting the passions and exciting the desires of his slaves, without permitting them the gratification of the one, or the enjoyment of the other. We see among all sects the portraiture of a chagrined Deity, the enemy of innocent amusements, and offended at the well being of his creatures. We see in all countries many men so foolish as to imagine they will merit heaven by fighting against their nature, refusing the goods of fortune, and tormenting themselves under an idea that they will thereby render themselves agreeable to God. Especially do they believe that they will by these means disarm the fury of God, prevent the infliction of his chastisements, if they sacrifice to the whims of priests, the enjoyment of those pleasures which are the natural inheritance of the human race.

We find these atrocious, fanatical, and senseless ideas in the Christian religion, which supposes its God as cruel to exact sufferings from men, as death from his only Son. If a God, exempt from all sin, is himself also the sufferer for the sins of all, which is the doctrine of those who maintain universal redemption, it is not surprising to see men that are sinners making it a duty to assemble in large meetings, and invent the means of rendering themselves miserable.

These gloomy notions have banished men to the desert. They have fanatically renounced society and the pleasures of life, to be buried alive, believing they would merit heaven if they afflicted themselves with stripes, and passed their existence in mummal ceremonies, as injurious to their health as useless to their country. And these are the false ideas by which the divinity is transformed into a tyrant as barbarous

as insensible, who, agreeable to *priestcraft* has prescribed how both men and women might live in ennui, penitence, sorrow, and tears; for the perfection of monastic institutions consists in the ingenious art of self-torture. But sacerdotal pride finds its account in these austerities. Rigid monks glory in barbarous rules, the observance of which attracts the respect of the credulous, who imagine that men who torment themselves, are indeed, the favourites of heaven. But these monks, who follow those austere rules, are fanatics, who sacrifice themselves to the pride of the clergy who live in luxury, and in wealth, although their duped, imbecile brethren have been known to make it a point of honour to die of famine.

How often, Madam, has your attention not been roused when you recalled to mind the fate of the poor religious men of the desert, whom an unnecessary vow has condemned, as it were voluntarily, to a life as rigorous as if spent in a prison! Seduced by the enthusiasm of youth, or forced by the orders of inhuman parents, they have been obliged to carry to the tomb the chains of their captivity. They have been obliged to submit without appeal to a stern superior, who finds no consolation in the discharge of his slavish task, but in making his empire more hard to those beneath him. You have seen unfortunate young ladies obliged to renounce their rank in society, the innocent pleasures of youth, the joys of their sex, to groan for ever under a rigorous despotism to which indiscreet vows had bound them. All monasteries present to us an odious group of fanatics, who have separated themselves from society to pass the remainder of their lives in unhappiness. The society of these devotees is calculated solely to render their lives mutually more unsupportable. But it seems strange that men should expect to merit heaven by suffering the torments of hell on earth; yet so it is, and reason has too often proved insufficient to convince them of the contrary.

If this religion does not call all Christians to these

sublime perfections, it nevertheless enjoins on all its votaries, suffering, and mortifying of the body. The church prescribes privations to all her children, and abstinence especially to the young; these things they practise amongst us as duties; and the devotees imagine they render themselves very agreeable to the Divinity when they have scrupulously fulfilled those minute and puerile practices, by which they tell us that the priests have proof whether their patience and obedience be such as are dictated by, and acceptable to Heaven.

What a ridiculous idea is it, for example, to make of the Deity, a trio of persons; to teach the faithful that this Deity takes notice of what kinds of food his people eat; that he is displeased if they eat beef or mutton; but that he is delighted if they eat beans and fish? In good sooth, Madam, our priests, who sometimes give us very lofty ideas of God, please themselves but too often with vilely misrepresenting the Sovereign of the universe.

The life of a good Christian, or of a devotee, is crowded with a host of useless practices, which would be, at least, pardonable if they procured any good for society. But it is not for that purpose that our priests make so much to do about them; they only wish to have submissive slaves, sufficiently blind to respect their caprices, as the orders of a wise God; sufficiently stupid to regard all their practices as divine duties, and they who scrupulously observe them as the real favourites of the Omnipotent. What good can there result to the world from the abstinence of meats, so much enjoined on some Christians, especially when other Christians judge this injunction a very ridiculous law, and contrary to reason and the order of things established in nature? It is not difficult to perceive amongst us, that this injunction, openly violated by the rich, is an oppression on the poor, who are compelled to pay dearly for an indifferent, often an unwholesome diet, that injures rather than repairs the natural strength of their constitutions. Besides, do not the priests sell

this permission to the rich, to transgress an injunction the poor must not violate with impunity? In fine, they seem to have multiplied our practices, our duties, and our tortures, to have the advantage of multiplying our faults, and thus strip us of a large portion of the harmless delights which nature bids us innocently enjoy.

The more we examine religion, the more reason shall we have to be convinced that it is beneficial to the *priests alone*. Every part of this religion conspires to render us submissive to the fantasies of our spiritual guides, to labour for their grandeur, to contribute to their riches. They appoint us to perform disadvantageous duties; they prescribe impossible perfections purposely that we may transgress; they have thereby engendered in pious minds, scruples and difficulties which they condescendingly appease for money. A devotee is obliged to observe without ceasing the useless and frivolous rules of his priest, and even then he is subject to continual reproaches; he is perpetually in want of his priest to expiate his pretended faults with which he charges himself, and the omission of duties that he regards as the most important acts of his life, but which are rarely such as interest society or benefit it by their performance. By a train of religious prejudices with which the priests infect the mind of their weak devotees, these believe themselves infinitely more culpable when they have omitted some useless practice, than if they had committed some great injustice or atrocious sin against humanity. It is commonly sufficient for the devotees to be on good terms with God, whether they be consistent in their actions with man, or in the practice of those duties they owe to society. But they who have set up a Divinity of their own making, can, of course, balance their conscience to the attributes of their God, though they may find them somewhat stubborn in bending to the rules of human conduct established among men by

the experience of ages and their mutual dependence.

Besides, Madam, what real advantage does society derive from repeated prayers, abstinences, privations, seclusions, meditations, and austerities, to which religion attaches so much value? Do all the mysterious practices of the priests produce any real good? Are they capable of calming the passions, of correcting vices, and of giving virtue to those who most scrupulously observe them? Do we not daily see persons who believe themselves damned if they forget a mass, if they eat a fowl on Friday, if they neglect a confession, though they are guilty at the same time of great direllection to society? Do they not hold the conduct of those very unjust, and very cruel, who happen to have the misfortune of not thinking and doing as they think and act? These practices, out of which a great number of men have created essential duties, but too commonly absorb all moral duties; for if the devotees are over religious, it is rare to find them virtuously nice. Content with doing what religion requires, they trouble themselves very little about other matters. They believe themselves the favoured of God, and that it is a proof of this if they are detested by men, whose good opinion they are seldom anxious to deserve. The whole life of a devotee is spent in fulfilling with scrupulous exactitude duties indifferent to God, unnecessary to himself and useless to others. He fancies he is virtuous when he has performed the rites which his religion prescribes; when he has meditated on mysteries of which he understands nothing; when he has struggled with sadness to do things in which a man of sense can perceive no advantage; in fine, when he has endeavoured to practise as much as in him lies, the Evangelical, or Christian virtues, in which he thinks all morality essentially consists.

I shall proceed in my next letter to examine these

virtues, and to prove to you that they are contrary to the ideas we ought to form of God, useless to ourselves and often dangerous to others. In the mean time,

I am, &c.

LETTER VIII.

IF we believe the priests, we shall be persuaded, that the Christian religion, by the beauty of its morals, excels philosophy and all the other religious systems in the world. According to them, the unassisted reason of the human mind could never have conceived sounder doctrines of morality, more heroical virtues, or precepts more beneficial to society. But this is not all; the virtues known or practised among the heathens are considered as *false virtues*, far from deserving our esteem, and the favour of the Almighty, they are entitled to nothing but contempt, and, indeed, are *flagrant sins* in the sight of God. In short, the priests labour to convince us, that the Christian ethics are purely divine, and the lessons inculcated so sublime, that they could proceed from nothing less than the Deity.

If, indeed, we call that Divine which men can neither conceive nor perform; if by divine virtues we are to understand virtues to which the mind of man cannot possibly attach the least idea of utility; if by divine perfections are meant those qualities which are not only foreign to the nature of man, but which are irreconcilably repugnant to it—then, indeed, we shall be compelled to acknowledge that the morals of Christianity are divine, at least we shall be assured that they have nothing in common with that system of morality which arises out of the nature and relations of men, but on the contrary, that they, in many instances, confound the best conceptions we are able to form of virtue.

Guided by the light of reason, we comprehend under the name of virtues, those habitual dispositions of the heart which tend to the happiness, and the real advantage of those with whom we associate, and by the exercise of which our fellow-creatures are induced to feel a reciprocal interest in our welfare. Under the Christian system the name of virtues is bestowed upon dispositions which it is impossible to possess without supernatural grace, and which, when possessed, are useless if not injurious, both to ourselves and others. The morality of Christians is, in good truth, the morality of another world. Like the philosopher of antiquity, they keep their eyes fixed upon the stars till they fall into a well, unperceived, at their feet. The only object which their scheme of morals proposes to itself is, to disgust their minds with the things of this world, in order that they may place their entire affections upon things above, of which they have no knowledge whatever; their happiness here below, forms no part of their consideration; this life, in the view of a Christian, is nothing but a pilgrimage, leading to another existence, infinitely more interesting to his hopes, because infinitely beyond the reach of his understanding. Besides, before we can deserve to be happy in the world which we do not know, we are informed that we must be miserable in the world which we do know; and, above all things, in order to secure to ourselves happiness hereafter, it is especially necessary that we altogether resign the use of our own reason, that is to say, we must seal up our eyes in utter darkness, and surrender ourselves to the guidance of our priests. These are the principles upon which the fabric of Christian morals is evidently constructed.

Let us now proceed, Madam, to a more detailed examination of the virtues upon which the Christian religion is built—these virtues are Evangelical, &c., if destitute of them, we are assured that it is in vain for us to seek the favour of the Deity.

Of these virtues the first is FAITH. According to

the doctrine of the church, faith is the gift of God, a supernatural virtue, by means of which we are inspired with a firm belief in God, and in all that he has vouchsafed to reveal to man, although our reason is utterly unable to comprehend it. Faith is, says the church, founded upon the word of God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived. Thus faith supposes, that God has spoken to man—but what evidence have we that God has spoken to man? The Holy Scriptures. Who is it that assures us the Holy Scriptures contain the word of God? It is the church. But who is it that assures us the church cannot and will not deceive us? The Holy Scriptures. Thus the Scriptures bear witness to the infallibility of the church—and the church, in return, testifies the truth of the Scriptures. From this statement of the case, you must perceive, that faith is nothing more than an implicit belief in the priests whose assurances we adopt as the foundation of opinions in themselves incomprehensible. It is true, that as a confirmation of the truth of Scripture, we are referred to miracles—but it is these identical Scriptures which report to us and testify those very miracles. Of the absolute impossibility of any miracles, I flatter myself that I have already convinced you.

Besides, I cannot but think, Madam, that you must be, by this time, thoroughly satisfied how absurd it is to say that the understanding is convinced of any thing which it does not comprehend; the insight I have given you into the books which the Christians call sacred, must have left upon your mind a firm persuasion, that they never could have proceeded from a wise, a good, an omniscient, a just, and all-powerful God. If, then, we cannot yield them a real belief, what we call faith can be nothing more than a blind and irrational adherence to a system devised by priests, whose crafty selfishness has made them careful from the earliest infancy to fill our tender minds with prepossessions in favour of their doctrines. Interested,

however, as they are in the opinions which they endeavour to force upon us as truths; is it possible for these priests to believe them themselves? Unquestionably not—the thing is out of nature. They are men like ourselves, furnished with the same faculties, and neither they nor we can be convinced of any thing which lies equally beyond the scope of us all. If they possessed an additional sense, we should perhaps allow that they might comprehend what is unintelligible to us; but as we clearly see that they have no intellectual privileges above the rest of the species, we are compelled to conclude, that their faith, like the faith of others, is a blind acquiescence in opinions derived, without examination, from their predecessors; and that they must be hypocrites when they pretend to *believe* in doctrines of the truth of which they cannot be *convinced*, since these doctrines have been shewn to be destitute of that degree of evidence which is necessary to impress the mind with a feeling of their probability, much less of certainty.

It will be said that faith, or the faculty of believing things incredible, is the gift of God, and can only be known to those upon whom God has bestowed the favour. My answer is that, if that be the case, we have no alternative but to wait till the grace of God shall be shed upon us—and that in the mean time we may be allowed to doubt whether credulity, stupidity, and the perversion of reason can proceed, as favours, from a rational Deity who has endowed us with the power of thinking.—If God be infinitely wise, how can folly and imbecility be pleasing to him? If there were such a thing as faith, proceeding from grace, it would be the privilege of seeing things otherwise than as God has made them; and if that were so, it follows, that the whole creation would be a mere cheat. No man can believe the Bible to be the production of God without doing violence to every consistent notion that he is able to form of Deity; no man can believe that one God is three Gods, and that those three Gods are

one God, without renouncing all pretension to common sense, and persuading himself that there is no such thing as certainty in mathematics!

Thus, Madam, we are bound to suspect that what the church calls a gift from above, a supernatural grace, is, in fact, a perfect blindness, an irrational credulity, a brutish submission, a vague uncertainty, a stupid ignorance, by which we are led to acquiesce, without investigation, in every dogma that our priests think fit to impose upon us—by which we are led to adopt, without knowing why, the pretended opinions of men who can have no better means of arriving at the truth than we have. In short, we are authorized in suspecting that no motive but that of blinding us, in order more effectually to deceive us, can actuate those men who are eternally preaching to us about a virtue which, if it could exist, would throw into utter confusion the simplest and clearest perceptions of the human mind.

This supposition is amply confirmed by the conduct of our ecclesiastics—forgetting what they have told us, that grace is the gratuitous present of God, bestowed or withheld at his sovereign pleasure, they nevertheless indulge their wrath against all those who have not received the gift of faith; they keep up one incessant anathema against all unbelievers, and nothing less than absolute extermination of heresy can appease their anger wherever they have the strength to accomplish it. So that heretics and unbelievers are made accountable for the grace of God, although they never received it; they are punished in this world for those advantages which God has not been pleased to extend to them in their journey to the next. In the estimation of priests and devotees, the want of faith is the most unpardonable of all offences—it is precisely that offence which, in the cruelty of their absurd injustice, they visit with the last rigours of punishment, for you cannot be ignorant, Madam, that in all countries where the clergy possess sufficient

influence, the flames of priestly Charity are lighted up to consume all those who are deficient in the prescribed allowance of faith.

When we enquire the motive for their unjust and senseless proceedings, we are told that faith is the most necessary of all things, that faith is of the most essential service to morals, that without faith a man is a dangerous and wicked wretch, a pest to society. And, after all, is it our own choice to have faith? Can we believe just what we please? Does it depend upon ourselves not to think a proposition absurd which our understanding shews us to be absurd? How could we avoid receiving, in our infancy, whatever impressions and opinions our teachers and relations chose to implant in us? And where is the man who can boast that he has faith—that he is fully convinced of mysteries which he cannot conceive, and wonders which he cannot comprehend?

Under these circumstances how can faith be serviceable to morals? If no one can have faith but upon the assurance of another, and consequently cannot entertain a real conviction, what becomes of the social virtues? Admitting that faith were possible, what connection can exist between such occult speculations and the manifest duties of mankind, duties which are palpable to every one who, in the least, consults his reason, his interest or the welfare of the society to which he belongs. Before I can be satisfied of the advantages of justice, temperance, and benevolence, must I first believe in the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Eucharist, and all the fables of the Old Testament? If I believe in all the atrocious murders attributed by the Bible, to that God whom I am bound to consider as the fountain of justice, wisdom, and goodness, is it not likely that I shall feel encouraged to the commission of crimes when I find them sanctioned by such an example? Although unable to discover the value of so many mysteries which I cannot understand, or of so many fanciful and cumbersome ceremonies prescribed

by the church, am I, on that account, to be denounced as a more dangerous citizen than those who persecute, torment, and destroy every one of their fellow-creatures who does not think and act at their dictation? The evident result of all these considerations, must be, that he who has a lively faith, and a blind zeal for opinions contradictory to common sense, is more irrational, and consequently more wicked than the man whose mind is untainted by such detestable doctrines; for when once the priests have gained their fatal ascendancy over his mind, and have persuaded him that, by committing all sorts of enormities, he is doing the work of the Lord, there can be no doubt that he will make greater havoc in the happiness of the world, than the man whose reason tells him that such excesses cannot be acceptable in the sight of God.

The advocates of the church will here interrupt me, by alleging that if divested of those sentiments which religion inspires, men would no longer live under the influence of motives strong enough to induce an abstinence from vice, or to urge them on in the career of virtue when obstructed by painful sacrifices. In a word, it will be affirmed that unless men are made to feel a conviction of rewards and punishments hereafter, they are released from every motive to fulfil their duties to each other in the present life.

You are doubtless, Madam, quite sensible of the futility of such pretences, put forth by priests, who, in order to render themselves more necessary, are indefatigable in endeavouring to persuade us that their system is indispensable to the maintenance of social order. To annihilate their sophistries it is sufficient to reflect upon the nature of man, his true interests, and the end for which society is formed. Man is a feeble being, whose necessities render him constantly dependent upon the support of others, whether it be for the preservation or the pleasure of his existence; he has no means of interesting others in his welfare except by his manner of conducting himself towards them; that

conduct which renders him an object of affection to others is called virtue—whatever is pernicious to society is called crime—and where the consequences are injurious only to the individual himself, it is called vice. Thus all men must immediately perceive that they consult their own happiness by advancing that of others—that vices however cautiously disguised from public observation are, nevertheless, fraught with ruin to those who practice them—and that crimes are sure to render their perpetrators odious or contemptible in the eyes of their associates. In short, education, public opinion, and the laws point out to us our mutual duties much more clearly than the chimeras of an incomprehensible religion.

The idea of self-preservation being implanted in us by nature, we require no priest to suggest it to us ; experience informs us by what means we best consult our own safety ; instructed by her faithful and salutary admonitions we avoid those excesses which might be injurious ; we debar ourselves those gratifications which, in their consequences, might render us unhappy ; we submit to momentary privations in order to secure those lasting advantages which we should have forfeited by unreasonable indulgence.

Here, Madam, you have a short but perfect summary of all morals, derived, as they must be, from the nature of man, the uniform experience, and the universal reason of mankind. These precepts are compulsory upon our minds, for they shew us that the consequences of our conduct flow from our actions with as natural and inevitable a certainty as the return of a stone to the earth after the impetus is exhausted which detained it in the air. It is natural and inevitable that the man who employs himself in doing good must be preferred to the man who does mischief. Every thinking being must be penetrated with the truth of this incontrovertible maxim, and all the ponderous volumes of theology that ever were composed can add nothing to the force of his conviction ; every

thinking being will, therefore, avoid a conduct calculated to injure either himself or others; he will feel himself under the necessity of doing good to others, as the only method of obtaining solid happiness for himself, and of conciliating to himself those sentiments on the part of others, without which society would be worse than solitude.

Can any thing be more obvious, Madam, than that faith has no concern in the support of morality? You see how widely separated are these aerial notions from the practical obligations arising out of the nature of things. In fact, the more mysterious and incomprehensible are the dogmas of the church, the more likely are they to draw us aside from the plain dictates of Nature and the straight-forward directions of Reason, whose voice is incapable of misleading us. A candid survey of the causes which produce an infinity of evils that afflict society, will quickly point out the speculative tenets of theology as their most fruitful source. The intoxication of enthusiasm and the phrenzy of fanaticism concur in overpowering reason, and by rendering men blind and unreflecting, convert them into enemies both of themselves and the rest of the world. It is impossible for the worshippers of a tyrannical, partial, and cruel God, to practice the duties of justice and philanthropy. As soon as the priests have succeeded in stifling within us the commands of Reason, they have already converted us into slaves, in whom they can kindle whatever passions it may please them to inspire us with.

Their interest, indeed, requires that we should be slaves. They exact from us the surrender of our reason, because our reason contradicts their impostures, and would ruin their plans of aggrandizement. Faith is the instrument by which they enslave us, and make us subservient to their own ambition. Hence arises their zeal for the propagation of the faith; hence arises their implacable hostility to science, and to all those who refuse submission to their yoke; hence arises

their incessant endeavour to establish the dominion of Faith (that is to say, their own dominion), even by fire and sword, the only arguments they condescend to employ.

It must be confessed that society derives but little advantage from this supernatural faith which the church has exalted into the first of virtues. As it regards God, it is perfectly useless to him, since if he wishes mankind to be convinced it is sufficient that He wills them to be so. It is utterly unworthy of the supreme wisdom of God, who cannot exhibit himself to mortals in a manner contradictory to the reason with which he has endowed them. It is unworthy of the divine justice, which cannot require from mankind to be convinced of that which they cannot understand. It denies the very existence of God himself, by inculcating a belief totally subversive of the only rational idea we are able to form of the Divinity.

As it regards morality, faith is also useless. Faith can add nothing to the inherent sanctity of morals, nothing to their importance. Faith is not only useless, but injurious to society, since, under the plea of its pretended necessity, the world is frequently disfigured by war and bloodshed. In short, faith is self-contradictory—since, by it, we are required to believe in things inconsistent with each other, and even incompatible with the principles laid down in the books which we have already investigated, and which contain what we are commanded to believe.

To whom then is faith found to be advantageous? To a few men only, who, availing themselves of its influence to degrade the human mind, contrive to render the labour of the whole world tributary to their own luxury, splendour, and power. Are the nations of the earth any happier for their faith, or their blind reliance on priests? Certainly not. Look round the universe and confess, with me, that in every country where the lofty church overshadows and darkens the land, there neither morality nor virtue, neither in-

dustry nor happiness can take root in the soil, but on the contrary, wherever the priests are powerful, there the people are sure to be found abject in their minds, and squalid in their condition.

But Hope—Hope, the second in order of the Christian perfections, is ever at hand to console us for the evils inflicted by Faith. We are commanded to be firmly convinced that those who have faith, that is to say, those who believe in priests, shall be amply rewarded in the other world for their meritorious submission in this. Thus hope is founded on faith, in the same manner as faith is established upon hope—faith enjoins us to entertain a devout hope that our faith will be rewarded. And what is it we are told to hope for? For unspeakable benefits—that is, benefits for which language contains no expression! So that, after all, we know not what it is we are to hope for. And how can we feel a hope or even a wish for any object that is undefinable? Really, these priests carry their presumption very far in everlastingly prating to us about things of which they, at the same time, acknowledge it is impossible for us to form any idea.

It thus appears, that hope and faith have one common foundation; the same blow which overturns the one necessarily levels the other with the ground. But let us pause a moment, and endeavour to discover the advantages of Christian hope amongst men. It encourages to the practice of virtue; it supports the unfortunate under the stroke of affliction; and consoles the believer in the hour of adversity. But what encouragement, what support, what consolation can be imparted to the mind from these undefined and undefinable shadows? No one, indeed, will deny, that hope is sufficiently useful to the priests, who never fail to call in its assistance for the vindication of Providence, whenever any of the elect have occasion to complain of the unmerited hardship or the transient injustice of his dispensations. Besides, these priests, notwithstanding their beautiful systems, find them-

selves unable to fulfil the high-sounding promises they so liberally make to all the faithful, and are frequently at a loss to explain the evils which they bring upon their flocks by means of the quarrels they engage in, and the false notions of religion they entertain ; on these occasions the priests have a standing appeal to hope, telling their dupes, that man was not created for this world, that Heaven is his home, and that his sufferings here will be counterbalanced by indescribable bliss hereafter. Thus, like quacks, whose nostrums have ruined the health of their patients, they have still left to themselves the advantage of selling hopes to those whom they know themselves unable to cure. Our priests resemble some of our physicians, who begin by frightening us into our complaints, in order that they may make us customers for the hopes, which they offer us at an exorbitant price. This traffic constitutes, in reality, all that is called religion.

The third of the Christian virtues is Charity ; that is, to love God above all things, and our neighbours as ourselves. But before we are required to love God above all things, it seems reasonable that religion should condescend to represent him as worthy of our love. In good faith, Madam, is it possible to feel that the God of the Christians is entitled to our love ? Is it possible to feel any other sentiments towards him than those of aversion, when we find him depicted as a partial, capricious, cruel, revengeful, jealous, and sanguinary tyrant ? How can we sincerely love the most terrible of Beings ? The living God, into whose hands it is dreadful to think of falling ? The God who can consign to eternal damnation those very creatures who, without his own consent, would never have existed ? Are our theologians aware of what they say, when they tell us that the fear of God is the fear of a child for its parent, which is mingled with love ? Are we not bound to hate,—can we by any means avoid detesting a barbarous father, whose injustice is so boundless as to punish the whole human race, though inno-

cent, in order to revenge himself upon two individuals for the sin of the apple, which sin he himself might have prevented if he had thought proper? In short, Madam, it is a physical impossibility to love, above all things, a God, whose whole conduct, as described in the Bible, fills us with a freezing horror. If, therefore, the love of God, as the Jansenists assert, is indispensable to salvation, we cannot wonder to find that the elect are so few. Indeed, there are not many persons who can restrain themselves from hating this God; and the doctrine of the Jesuits is, that to abstain from hating him is sufficient for salvation. The power of loving a God, whom religion paints as the most detestable of Beings, would, doubtless, be a proof of the most supernatural grace, that is, a grace the most contrary to nature; to love that which we do not know, is, assuredly, sufficiently difficult; to love that which we fear, is still more difficult; but to love that which is exhibited to us in the most repulsive colours, is manifestly impossible.

We must, after all this, be thoroughly convinced that, except by means of an invisible Grace never communicated to the profane, no Christian in his sober senses, can love his God; even those devotees who pretend to that happiness are apt to deceive themselves—their conduct resembles that of hypocritical flatterers, who, in order to ingratiate themselves with an odious tyrant, or to escape his resentment, make every profession of attachment, whilst, at the bottom of their hearts, they execrate him; or on the other hand, they must be condemned as enthusiasts who, by means of a heated imagination, become the dupes of their own illusions, and only view the favourable side of a God, declared to be the fountain of all good, yet, nevertheless, constantly delineated to us with every feature of wickedness. Devotees, when sincere, are like women given up to the infatuation of a blind passion by which they are enamoured with lovers, rejected by the rest of the sex as unworthy of their affection. It was

said by Madame de Sevigné that she loved God, as a perfectly well bred Gentleman whom she had never been acquainted with. But can the God of the Christians be esteemed a well-bred Gentleman? Unless her head was turned, one would think that she must have been cured of her passion by the slightest reference to her imaginary lover's portrait as drawn in the Bible, or as it is spread upon the canvass of our theological artists.

With regard to the love of our neighbour, where was the necessity of religion to teach us our duty, which as men we cannot but feel, of cherishing sentiments of good-will towards each other. It is only by shewing in our conduct an affectionate disposition to others that we can produce in them correspondent feelings towards ourselves. The simple circumstance of being men is quite sufficient to give us a claim upon the heart of every man who is susceptible of the sweet sensibilities of our nature. Who is better acquainted than yourself, Madam, with this truth? Does not your compassionate soul experience, at every moment, the delightful satisfaction of solacing the unhappy? Setting aside the superfluous precepts of religion, think you that you could by any efforts, steel your heart against the tears of the unfortunate? Is it not by rendering our fellow-creatures happy that we establish an empire in their hearts? Enjoy then, Madam, this delightful sovereignty; continue to bless with your beneficence all that surround you; the consciousness of being the dispenser of so much good will always sustain your mind with the most gratifying self-applause; those who have received your kindness will reward you with their blessings, and afford you the tribute of affection, which mankind are ever eager to lay at the feet of their benefactors.

Christianity, not satisfied with recommending the love of our neighbour, superadds the injunction of loving our enemies. This precept attributed to the Son of God himself, forms the ground on which our di-

vines claim for their religion a superiority of moral doctrine over all that the philosophers of antiquity were known to teach. Let us, therefore, examine how far this precept admits of being reduced to practice. True, that an elevated mind may easily place itself above a sense of injuries—a noble spirit retains no resentful recollections—a great soul revenges itself by a generous clemency, but it is an absurd contradiction to require that a man shall entertain feelings of tenderness and regard for those whom he knows to be bent on his destruction,—this love of our enemies, which Christianity is so vain of having promulgated, turns out then to be an impracticable commandment, belied and denied by every Christian at every moment of his life. How preposterous to talk of loving that which annoys us ! Of cherishing an attachment for that which gives us pain—of receiving an outrage with joy—of loving those who subject us to misery and suffering ! No ; in the midst of these trials, our firmness may perhaps be strengthened by the hope of reward hereafter, but it is a mere fallacy to talk of our entertaining a sincere love for those whom we deem the authors of our afflictions—the least that we can do is to avoid them, which will not be looked upon as a very strong indication of our love.

Notwithstanding the solemn formality with which the Christian religion obtrudes upon us these vaunted precepts of love of our neighbour, love of our enemies, and forgiveness of injuries, it cannot escape the observation of the weakest amongst us, that those very men who are the loudest in praising, are also the first and most constant in violating them. Our priests especially seem to consider themselves exempt from the troublesome necessity of adopting for their own conduct a too literal interpretation of this divine law. They have invented a most convenient salvo, since they affect to exclude all those who do not profess to think as they dictate, not only from the kindness of neighbours, but even from the rights of fellow-crea-

tures. On this principle they defame, persecute, and destroy every one who displeases them. When do you see a priest forgive? When revenge is out of his reach! But it is never their own injuries they punish—it is never their own enemies they seek to exterminate. Their disinterested indignation burns with resentment against the enemies of the Most High, who, without their assistance, would be incapable of adjusting his own quarrels! By an unaccountable coincidence, however, it is sure to happen that the enemies of the church are the enemies of the Most High, who never fail to make common cause with the ministers of the faith, and who would take it extremely ill if his ministers should relax in the measure of punishment due to their common enemy. Thus our priests are cruel and revengeful from pure zeal—they would ardently wish to forgive their own enemies, but how could they justify themselves to the God of Merodis, if they extended the least indulgence to his enemies!

A true Christian loves the Creator, above all things, and consequently he must love him in preference to the creature. We feel a lively interest in every thing that concerns the object of our love; from all which it follows, that we must evince our zeal, and even, when necessary, we must not hesitate to exterminate our neighbour, if he says or does what is displeasing or injurious to God. In such a case, indifference would be criminal—a sincere love of God breaks out into a holy ardour in his cause, and our merit rises in proportion to our violence.

These notions, absurd as they are, have been sufficient in every age to produce in the world a multitude of crimes, extravagancies, and follies, the legitimate offspring of a religious zeal. Infatuated fanatics, exasperated by priests against each other, have been driven into mutual hatred, persecution, and destruction; they have thought themselves called upon to avenge the Almighty; they have carried their insane delusions so far as to persuade themselves, that the God of clemency and

goodness could look on with pleasure while they murdered their brethren; in the astonishing blindness of their stupidity, they have imagined that in defending the temporalities of the church, they were defending God himself. In pursuance of these errors, contradicted even by the description which they themselves give us of the Divinity, the priests of every age have found means to introduce confusion into the peaceful habitations of men, and to destroy all who dared to resist their tyranny. Under the laughable idea of revenging the all-powerful Creator, these priests have discovered the secret of revenging themselves, and that too, without drawing down upon themselves the hatred and execration so justly due to their vindictive fury and unfeeling selfishness. In the name of the God of Nature, they stifled the voice of nature in the breasts of men; in the name of the God of goodness, they incited men to the fury of wild beasts; in the name of the God of mercies, they prohibited all forgiveness! The earth has never ceased to groan with the ravages committed by maniacs, under the influence of that zeal which springs from the Christian doctrine of the love of God. The God of the Christians, like the Janus of Roman mythology, has two faces; sometimes he is represented with the benign features of mercy and goodness; sometimes murder, revenge, and fury issue from his nostrils. And what is the consequence but that the Christians are much more easily terrified at his frightful aspect, than they are recovered from their fears by his aspect of mercy; having been taught to view him as a capricious being, they are naturally mistrustful of him, and imagine that the safest part they can act for themselves is to set about the work of vengeance with great zeal; they conclude that a cruel master cannot find fault with cruel imitators, and that his servants cannot render themselves so acceptable as by extirpating all his enemies.

The preceding remarks shew very clearly, Madam, the highly pernicious consequences which result from

the zeal engendered by the love of God. If this love is a virtue, its benefits are confined to the priests, who arrogate to themselves the exclusive privilege of declaring when God is offended ; who absorb all the offerings, and monopolize all the homage of the devout ; who decide upon the opinions that please or displease him ; who undertake to inform mankind of the duties this virtue requires from them, and of the proper time and manner of performing them ; who are interested in rendering those duties cruel and intimidating in order to frighten mankind into a profitable subjection ; who convert it into the instrument of gratifying their own malignant passions, by inspiring men with a spirit of headlong and raging intolerance, which in its furious course of indiscriminate destruction holds nothing sacred, and which has inflicted incredible ravages upon all christian countries :

In conformity with such abominable principles, a Christian is bound to detest and destroy all whom the church may point out as the enemies of God. Having admitted the paramount duty of yielding their entire affections to a rigorous master, quick to resent, and offended even with the involuntary thoughts and opinions of his creatures, they, of course, feel themselves bound by entering with zeal into his quarrels, to obtain for him a vengeance worthy of a God, that is to say, a vengeance that knows no bounds. A conduct like this is the natural offspring of those revolting ideas which our priests give us of the Deity. A good Christian is, therefore, necessarily intolerant. It is true that Christianity in the pulpit preaches nothing but mildness, meekness, toleration, peace, and concord ; but Christianity in the world is a stranger to all these virtues, nor does she ever exercise them, except when she is deficient in the necessary power to give effect to her destructive zeal. The real truth of the matter is, that Christians think themselves absolved from every tie of humanity, except with those who think as they do, who profess to believe the same creed ;—they have a repugnance, more or less decided,

against all those who disagree with their priests in theological speculation. How common it is to see persons of the mildest character and most benevolent disposition, regard with aversion the adherents of a different sect from their own; the reigning religion, that is, the religion of the sovereign, or of the priests: in whose favour the sovereign declares himself, crushes all rival sects, or at least, makes them fully sensible of its superiority and its hatred, in a manner extremely insulting, and calculated to raise their indignation. By these means it frequently happens that the deference of the prince to the wishes of the priests, has the effect of alienating the hearts of his most faithful subjects, and brings him that execration which ought, in justice, to be heaped exclusively upon his sanctioning instigators.

In short, the private rights of conscience are nowhere sincerely respected; the leaders of the various religious sects begin, in the very cradle, to teach all Christians to hate and despise each other about some theological point which nobody can understand. The clergy, when vested with power, never preach toleration; on the contrary, they consider every man as an enemy who is a friend to religious freedom, accusing him of lukewarmness, infidelity, and secret hostility—in short, he is denominated a false brother. The Sorbonne declared in the sixteenth century, that it was heretical to say that heretics ought not to be burnt. The ferocious St. Austin preached toleration at one period, but it was before he was duly initiated in the mysteries of the sacerdotal policy, which is ever repugnant to toleration. Persecution is necessary to our priests, to deter mankind from opposing themselves to their avarice, their ambition, their vanity, and their obstinacy. The sole principle which holds the church together is that of a sleepless watchfulness on the part of all its members to extend its power, to increase the multitude of its slaves, to fix odium on all who hesi-

tate to bend their necks to its yoke, or who refuse their assent to its arbitrary decisions.

Our divines have, therefore, you see, very good reasons for raising humility into the rank of a virtue. An amiable modesty, a diffident mildness of demeanour, are unquestionably calculated to promote the pleasures and the advantages of society; it is equally certain that insolence and arrogance are disgusting, that they wound our self-love, and excite our aversion by their repulsive conduct;—but that amiable modesty which charms all who come within its influence, is a far different quality from that which is designated humility in the vocabulary of Christians. A truly humble Christian despises his own unworthiness, avoids the esteem of others, mistrusts his own understanding, submits with docility to the unerring guidance of his spiritual masters, and piously resigns to his priest the clearest and most irrefutable conclusions of reason.

But to what advantage can this pretended virtue lead its followers? How can a man of sense and integrity despise himself? Is not public opinion the guardian of private virtue? If you deprive men of the love of glory, and the desire of deserving the approbation of their fellow citizens, are you not divesting them of the noblest and most powerful incitements by which they can be impelled to benefit their country? What recompence will remain to the benefactors of mankind, if, first of all, we are unjust enough to refuse them the praise they merit; and afterwards debar them from the satisfaction of self-applause, and the happiness they would feel in the consciousness of having done good to an ungrateful world? What infatuation, what amazing infatuation, to require a man of upright character, of talents, intelligence, and learning, to think himself on a level with a selfish priest, or a stupid fanatic, who deal out their absurd fables and incoherent dreams. Our priests are never weary of telling their flocks that pride leads on to infidelity, and that

an humble and submissive spirit is alone fitted to receive the truths of the gospel. In good earnest, should we not be utterly bereft of every claim to the name of rational beings, if we consent to surrender our judgment and our knowledge at the command of a hierarchy, who have nothing to give us in exchange but the most palpable absurdities? With what face can a reverend Doctor of Nonsense dare to exact from my understanding a humble acquiescence in a bundle of mysterious opinions, for which he is unable to offer me a single solid reason? Is it then presumptuous to think oneself superior to a class of pretenders, whose systems are a mass of falsities, absurdities, and inconsistencies, of which they contrive to make mankind at once the dupes and the victims? Can pride or vanity be, with justice, imputed to you, Madam, if you see reason to prefer the dictates of your own understanding to the authoritative decrees of Mrs. D——, whose senseless malignity is obvious to all her acquaintance.

If Christian humility is a virtue at all, it can be one only in the cloister; society can derive no sort of benefit from it; it enervates the mind; it benefits nobody but priests; who, under the pretext of rendering men humble, seek, in reality, only to degrade them, to stifle in their souls every spark of science and of courage, that they may the more easily impose the yoke of faith, that is to say, their own yoke. Conclude, then, with me, that the Christian virtues are chimerical, always useless, and sometimes pernicious to men, and attended with advantage to none but priests. Conclude that this religion, with all the boasted beauty of its morality, recommends to us a set of virtues, and enjoins a line of conduct at variance with good sense. Conclude, that in order to be moral and virtuous, it is far from necessary to adopt the unintelligible creed of the priests, or to pride ourselves upon the empty virtues they preach, and still less to annihilate all sense of dignity in ourselves, by a degrading subjection to the duties they require. Conclude, in short, that the

friend of virtue is not, of necessity, the friend of priest-craft, and that a man may be adorned with every human perfection, without possessing one of the Christian virtues.

All who examine this matter with a candid and intelligent eye, cannot fail to see that true morality, that is to say, a morality really serviceable to mankind, is absolutely incompatible with the Christian religion, or any other professed revelation. Whoever imagines himself the favoured object of the Creator's love, must look down with disdain upon his less fortunate fellow creatures, especially if he regards that Creator as partial, choleric, revengeful, and fickle, easily incensed against us, even by our involuntary thoughts, or our most innocent words and actions; such a man naturally conducts himself with contempt and pride, with harshness and barbarity towards all others whom he may deem obnoxious to the resentment of his Heavenly King. Those men whose folly leads them to view the Deity in the light of a capricious, irritable, and unappeasable despot, can be nothing but gloomy and trembling slaves, ever eager to anticipate the vengeance of God upon all whose conduct or opinions they may conceive likely to provoke the celestial wrath. As soon as the priests have succeeded in reducing men to a state of stupidity gross enough to make them believe that their ghostly fathers are the faithful organs of the divine will, they naturally commit every species of crime, which their spiritual teachers may please to tell them is calculated to pacify the anger of their offended God. Men silly enough to accept a system of morals from guides thus hollow in reasoning, and thus discordant in opinion, must necessarily be unstable in their principles, and subject to every variation that the interest of their guides may suggest. In short, it is impossible to construct a solid morality, if we take for our foundation the attributes of a Deity so unjust, so capricious, and so changeable as the God of the Bible, whom we are commanded to imitate and adore.

Persevere, then, my dear Madam, in the practice of those virtues which your own unsophisticated heart approves; they will insure you a rich harvest of happiness in the present existence; they will insure you a rich return of gratitude, respect and love from all who enjoy their benign influence; they will insure you the solid satisfaction of a well-founded self-esteem, and thus provide you with that unfailing source of inward gratification, which arises from the consciousness of having contributed to the welfare of the human race.

I am, &c.

LETTER IX.

HAVING already shewn you, Madam, the feebleness of those succours which religion furnishes to morals, I shall now proceed to examine whether it procure advantages in themselves really politic, and whether it be true, as has so often been urged by the priests, that it is absolutely necessary to the existence of every government.

Were we disposed to shut our eyes, and deliver ourselves up to the language of our priests, we should believe that their opinions are necessary to the public tranquillity, and the repose and security of the state; for those holy guides actually tell the credulous mob, from the bloated pensioner to the lacquey of his lowest tradesman, that princes could not, without the aids of religion, govern their people, and exert themselves for their prosperity and that of the empire. Nor is this all; our spiritual pilots approach the throne, and gaining the ear of the sovereign, make him also believe that an established religion is absolutely necessary to enable him to grasp the sceptre, and enjoy the grandeur and state of royalty; that he must, therefore, conform to the church; that kings in all ages have been her sons or protectors; that as the people submit to be

governed, so the monarch must submit to the yoke of the church ; that religion is the peace-maker in all political quarrels ; that the enemies of the priesthood are the enemies of all power ; that they who sap the foundations of the altar, would overthrow the throne itself !

Let us examine if these things are so ; for assertion is not proof, and the *ipsi dixerunt* of priests, like the proclamations of princes, are not laws for the world. No ; the former are the thunders of the pulpit, the latter, those of the throne. The mind of the honest citizen, like the face of a granite rock, suffers the blast of both to blow against it, without losing its equilibrium.

We have, then, only to open our eyes and consult history, to be convinced of the falsity of these pretensions, and to appreciate the important services which the Christian priests have rendered to their sovereigns. Ever since the establishment of Christianity we have seen, in all the countries in which this religion has gained ground, that two rival powers are perpetually at war one with the other. We find a government within the government. That is to say, we find the Church, a body of priests, continually opposed to the sovereign power, and in virtue of their pretended *divine* mission and *sacred* office, pretending to give laws to all the sovereigns of the earth.

Nor is this the case with the hierarchy of Rome alone ; the bishops and priests of all seceders from that church have arrogated to themselves the same authority. We find the clergy, puffed up and besotted with the titles they have given themselves, labouring to exact the obedience due to the sovereign, pretending to chimerical and dangerous prerogatives, which none are suffered to question, without risking the displeasure of the Almighty. And so well have the priesthood managed this matter, that in many countries we actually see the people more inclined to lean to the authority of the clergy, than to that of the prince. It is not to

the Pope alone, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, that this degraded submission of mind and liberty has been shewn; in Protestant countries, also, the clergy have contrived to make it be believed; that the law of the land is founded on their religion; that since obedience is due to the law, it is much more so due to that in which the law is founded. But it is very extraordinary, that in the parliament of Great Britain the legislators never consult the scriptures, as to what laws they should enact. Oh! no; circumstances, the position of the world, the march of intelligence against the iron hand of despotism, give occasion for the enactment of laws; and the Bible is no more thought of in an assembly of legislators, than the "Arabian Nights' Entertainments." So much, Madam, for the law of the land being founded on the religion of the clergy.

But let us return to the pretensions of the priesthood. These gentlemen pretend that the sanctity of their mission,—which by the bye is mere assertion, for there can be little divine about men mortal like ourselves, little sanctity about men who are eternally squabbling with the rest of the world for comfortable livings, tythes, and power, prerogative and rule,—these gentlemen pretend, however, that the sanctity of their mission entitles them to dictate to monarchs themselves; and there are not wanting cases, on the page of history, wherein we see the clergy supported by their emissaries and their credulous rabble of devotees, assuming the most ridiculous pretensions, mingling in the affairs of state, and by the most artful methods contriving to get the most pernicious and dangerous projects executed against all those who are honest enough to suspect them of trickery; or, if occasion serves them, to excite the prince to involve his unoffending subjects in quarrels with some neighbouring states; for while men's minds are distracted by the cry of "war,"—"war,"—"invasion,"—"invasion;" when discord and alarm are spread within, and when nothing but trouble

appears without, they who had formerly harmlessly questioned the right of the priests to amass wealth, and grind the poor for the gratification of their luxury and extravagance, will have leisure to fight the battles of domestic liberty ; and honest men, who care little about the cry of " the church is in danger," will condescend to defend the throne at any risk, at all expences. This, however, is but one figure in the groupe which the entablature of priestcraft offers to the eye of the observer.

Yet, Madam, such is part of the important services which religion has a thousand times pretended to render kings. The people, blinded by the superstition, could hesitate but little between God and the prince of the earth. The priests being the visible organs of an invisible monarch, have gained immense credit over the human mind. The ignorance of the people has put them, as well as their princes, entirely under the authority of the priesthood. And till a time shall arrive when the people shall put down the power of the priests, their kings must also be the common slaves of the crafty clergy. Do we not find, from history, that great mirror of the universe, that nations have been constantly embroiled by the futile and malicious quarrels of the clergy ; that princes and people, who have ever attempted to oppose those overbearing tyrants of the human mind, have been denounced as opinionative heretics, blasphemers, and enemies of God ; that the most bigoted nations, people and princes, who have voluntarily yielded to the iron despotism of the priesthood, have been pronounced the greatest favourites of heaven, and all others ripe for perdition. The conclusion is here but one step—the destruction of these last was believed by the former, not only meritorious, but necessary, and accordingly, having caught hold of this fiery link in the chain of discord, nation wars against nation, the ministers of peace are seen in the field of battle, their lives are stained with the murder of mankind, their palaces are enriched with the spoils of the vanquished, and all is holy, just, and good.

Such is the next figure in the base of the pyramidal groupe of the portraiture of priestcraft. The following is still more hideous.—

The continual attention which the princes of Europe have been forced to pay to the clergy, has prevented them from occupying their thoughts about the welfare of the rest of their industrious subjects, who, in many instances the dupes of the priesthood, have unwittingly become opposed even to the good they have desired to procure by resistance. In like manner the heads of the people, their kings and governors, too weak to resist the torrent of opinions propagated by the clergy, and swallowed without examination by the people, have been forced to yield, to bow, nay, even to caress the priesthood, and to consent to grant it all its demands. Whenever they have wished to resist the encroachments of the clergy, they have encountered concealed snares or open opposition, as the *holy* power was either too weak to act in the face of day, or strong enough to contend in the sun-shine. When princes have wished to be listened to by the clergy, these last have invariably contrived to make them cowardly, and to sacrifice the happiness and respect of their people. We have frequently seen the hands of parricides and rebels, assassins and fanatics armed in the sacerdotal worship, to destroy princes whom the clergy have thought unworthy to reign, because, forsooth, those princes have desired to make all their subjects happy, the people as well as the priests. France lost two monarchs by the machinations of the clergy. There the priests, under the pretext of avenging God, have murdered kings. This is one way of preserving the yoke on the necks of the multitude. In a word, Madam, in all countries, we see that the ministers of religion have exercised at all times, the most frightful licence to establish and perpetuate their power. We find empires torn by their feuds, thrones overturned by their machinations; princes immolated to their power and revenge; subjects ani-

mated to revolt against the prince that ought to give them more happiness than they actually enjoyed ; and when we take the retrospect of these, we find that the ambition, the cupidity, and the vanity of the clergy have been the true causes and motives of all these outrages on the peace of the universe. And it is thus that their religion has so often produced anarchy, and overturned the very empires they pretended to support by its influence.

Thus we have contemplated another horrible demon, in the tablature of priesthood. In the remaining sketch of the monsters that compose the groupe, we will attend to the countenance and the colouring of the drapery ; by which means the reader will recognise the figures at his leisure one by one.

That sovereigns have not enjoyed peace, even when, with a false humility devoted to priests, they have submitted to their caprices, become enslaved to their opinions, and allowed them to govern in place of themselves, we will see in the sequel ! For, whenever the sovereign power has become subordinate to the sacerdotal, the prince was only the first servant of the church. She has used him merely as a tool to enrich her coffers, to execute her secret, sanguinary decrees, and thus to bathe his hands in the innocent blood of his unoffending subjects, whom the priesthood had marked out for their vengeance, and concealed passions ! History attests that, in place of labouring for the happiness of the people, the sovereign has often been compelled to torment, to persecute, to immolate the most worthy citizens.— And all this to keep on terms with an overbearing, proud, revengeful, ambitious herd of priests ! And all this to gratify the revenge of some one man in a million ; some pampered hypocrite, who arrogated to himself the most hellish projects under the sanction of his office. Nor is it in one religious persuasion this is alone the case ; in a greater or less degree, openly or secretly ; by the sword or the secular power ;

by the perversion of laws and the point of the bayonet, we find it true in all persuasions.

How little soever you are disposed to reflect, you will be convinced, Madam, that I do not exaggerate these things. Recent examples prove to you that even in this age, nations are distracted by the intrigues of priests; you have an hundred times sighed at the sight of the sad follies which puerile questions have produced amongst us. You have shuddered at the frightful consequences which have resulted from the unreasonable squabbles of the clergy. You have trembled with all good citizens at the sight of the tragical effects, which have been brought about by the furious wickedness of a fanatic, who shewed in his character every thing that was not sacred. In fine, you have seen the sovereign authority compelled to struggle incessantly against rebellious subjects, who pretend that their conscience, or the interests of religion have obliged them to resist opinions the most agreeable to common sense, and the most equitable.

Our priests more religious and less brilliant than we have witnessed them in former times, are yet the actors of scenes more terrible than heathenism boasts. They have gloried in civil wars, the overthrow of treaties, the shedding in the very capital the blood of the innocent; two monarchs successively immolated to the fury of the clergy, who kindle in all parts the fire of sedition. In France we have seen the Catholic church banish the industrious Protestants; in England we see the furious Protestant wage war against the opinions of those who differ from him, and who cannot believe that three Gods are but one; and that one God only is nevertheless three distinct divinities.

In all Europe we find the same. In Spain religion is the tool with which the march of opinion is arrested; and whoever is not a fanatic is an object of public vengeance. In Germany two great religious factions distract princes and people; the Catholics are taught from their cradles to hate the Protestants; and the

Protestants to despise the Catholics as idolaters. Each faction is leagued against the other, with some neighbouring faction of a similar persuasion. But all are alike the servile creatures of artful priests and clergymen.

Thus you see, Madam, the signal advantages which the priesthood bring to nations. But the clergy forget not to tell us that all those terrible effects which I have detailed, are to be traced to the passions of mankind, and not to the doctrines of the Christian religion, which always recommends charity, concord, and peace. Yet if we reflect on the principles of this religion, we shall perceive that they are incompatible with the fine maxims which were practised by the Christian teachers, at a time when they had not the power, and we may believe also the inclination to persecute their enemies, and ensanguine their hands in the blood of their countrymen. Nevertheless we find that the adorers of a jealous God, vindictive and sanguinary, as is obviously the character of the God of the Jews and Christians, could not evince in their conduct moderation, tranquillity, and humanity. The adorers of a God who takes offence at the opinions of his weak creatures, who reprobates, and glories in the extermination of all who do not worship him in a particular way, for the which, by the bye, he gives them neither the means nor the inclination, must necessarily be intolerant persecutors. The adorers of a God, who has not thought fit to illuminate with an equal portion of light the minds of all his creatures, who reveals his favour, and bestows his kindness on a few only of those creatures, who leaves the remainder in blindness and uncertainty, to follow their passions, or adopt opinions against which the favoured wage war, must of necessity be eternally at odds with the rest of the world, canting about their oracles and mysteries, supernatural precepts, invented purely to torment the human mind, to enthrall it, and leave man answerable for what he could not obey, and punishable for what he was restrained from performing.

We need not then be astonished, if, since the origin of Christianity, our priests have never been without disputes. It appears from their conduct, and from their conduct we must judge of their religion, for it is very natural to suppose that the priests of every religion are fashioned according to the tenets of that religion, else are they not its priests, but a herd of impostors, the annihilation of whose pretensions must always be the duty of the state they are in ; that true priests and true religion may prosper, it appears from their conduct, I say, that God sent his Son upon earth solely to cast among mankind the apple of discord. The ministers of a church founded by Christ himself, who promised to send them his Holy Spirit to lead them into all the truth, have never been in unison with their dogmas. We have seen this infallible church for whole ages enveloped in error. At least its modern seceders say so. And if doctors differ, who shall agree ? You, know, Madam, that in the fourth century, by the acknowledgment of the priests themselves, the great body of the church followed the opinions of the Arians, who disavowed even the divinity of Jesus Christ. The spirit of God must then have abandoned his church, else why did its ministers fall into this error, and dispute afterwards about so fundamental a dogma of the Christian religion ?

Notwithstanding these continual quarrels, the church arrogates to itself the right of fixing the faith of the *true believers*, and in this it pretends to infallibility ; and if the Protestant parsons have renounced the lofty and ridiculous pretensions of their Catholic brethren, they are not less certain in the infallibility of their decisions ; for they talk with the authority of oracles, and send to hell and damnation all who do not yield submission to their dogmas. Thus on both sides of the cross we see division and discord ; each party is orthodox in its own eyes, and rails against the other as deceivers ; and too frequently violence settles their disputes, and with them *might is right*,

as much as with the conqueror. The *orthodox* are those among whom the prince ranks ; the *heretics* are those who are not of the established sect. Hindoos, Mussulmen, Christians, all are right in their own eyes ; but let us examine their pretensions.

According to the Christians, there is no salvation, no getting up to heaven, no escaping hell,—a place no one knows where situate, whether in the sun or the nucleus of a comet—but by Christ. Now the Hindoos believe not in Christ but in Vistnou, a God of their own making, therefore the Hindoos cannot get to heaven. And the Musselmans believe in Mahomet ; but Mahomet was an impostor according to the Christians ; therefore the Musselmans cannot get to heaven. According to the Protestants, idolaters cannot get to heaven ; but according to the same Protestants, the Roman Catholics worship images ; therefore the poor Catholics cannot get to heaven, for no idolater shall enter that blest abode. According to the Catholics, there is no salvation but within the pale of their church, at the head of which his Holiness of Rome presides, as vicar of Jesus Christ upon earth ; therefore the Protestants being without the pale of the Church of Rome, must all be damned. According to the Jews, Christians are impostors ; and the impostor and his followers must both perish ; therefore both sects of Christians, Catholics and Protestants, must go headlong to the devil. And for the same reason the Musselmans may go to the devil also. In what religion then is salvation to be found ?

Yet although we have considered the priests as the authors of the various religions they as variously support, we shall find, that kings and emperors have been the chief, the final resort of the priests for fixing the faith of the Christians ; and that one stroke of the sword has done more to establish it than all the ratiocinations of the clergy ; yet by this means opinions pleasing to the divinity are propagated. So Mahomet established the *Al' Coran* ; so the Roman emperors

after Constantine made whole nations of the Germans Christians, and baptized them by the thousand in the waters of the Danube. The true faith is, then, that which has always princes as its adherents ; the faithful are always those who are employed to exterminate their enemies ; the weak, not the powerful, are the enemies of God ! Horrible ! most horrible ! In a word, the *princes* of the earth, not the priests of this or that religion, are *infallible* ; they are those whom we must regard as the true founders of the faith over which they preside ; they are those who, in all ages and in all countries, have fixed the faith that must be obeyed ; they are those who have invariably fixed the religion of their subjects.

Ever since Christianity has been adopted by some nations, have we not seen that religion has almost entirely occupied the attention of sovereigns ? For the princes, blinded by superstition, have been wholly devoted to the priests, and have believed that prudence required, as the surest means for supporting their own power, that they also should submit themselves to the clergy, who seemed to be the real leaders and guides of the people, who saw nothing more divine than the ministers of a God, of whom all their ideas resemble the shadows of evening, growing darker, and rendering them more gloomy as the twilight of time rapidly declines. In either case the health of the body politic has never been consulted ; it was cowardly sacrificed to the interests of the court, or the vanity and luxury of the priests. It is by a continuation of superstition on the part of the princes, that we behold the church so richly endowed in times of ignorance ; when men believed they would enrich Deity, by putting all their wealth into the hands of the priests of a good God, the declared enemy of riches. Savage warriors, destitute of the manners of men, flattered themselves that they could expiate all their sins by founding monasteries, and giving immense wealth to a set of men who had made vows of poverty. It was believed that they

would merit from the all-powerful a great advantage by recompensing laziness, which, in the priests, was regarded as a great good, and that the blessings procured by their prayers would be in proportion to the continual and pressing demands their poverty made on the wealthy.

It is thus that by the superstition of princes, the great men of the earth, and the people also, the clergy have become opulent and powerful; that monachism was honoured, and citizens the most useless, the least instructed, but withal the most dangerous, were very well recompensed and become in time the most considerable portion of the community, surrounded by privileges and immunities, enjoying independence, power, and licence denied to all other ranks and classes; it was thus that the imprudent devotion of sovereigns put the priests in a condition to resist even those sovereigns themselves, to make laws independent of their authority, and trouble their governments with impunity.

The clergy arriving at this point of power and grandeur, became redoubtable to monarchs themselves, who were frequently forced to submit to the yoke imposed on them by the haughty priesthood. When the sovereigns yielded, they were the veriest slaves of the priests, the instruments of their passions, the vile adorers of their power. When they refused to yield, the priests annoyed and embarrassed them by the cruelest stratagems; hurled against them the anathemas of the church, dissolved the people from their obedience, and set subjects and princes in array, declaring that whoever obeyed the church were the favourites of heaven, and those who refused the children of the devil. Nor could the prince in this case keep himself on his throne but by consenting at length to obey the priests. And there have been times when, in Europe, princes could enjoy no repose for themselves or their people, unless they unequivocally conceded every point to the caprice of the clergy. For in these times of ignorance, civil

broils were as favourable to the cause of the clergy, as devotion, and a weak and poor prince, surrounded by a wretched people, was entirely at the mercy of the priesthood, who would at any moment they chose annihilate his power, excite his people against him, and hurl him from the height of royalty into the lowest abyss of misery.

In general, Madam, we find that in countries where religion has gained dominion, the sovereign is necessarily dependent on the clergy, and enjoys power in proportion as he obeys them, for the instant he displeases them, his power vanishes like the dew of morning; and the priests, with the people, and the cross for their banner, hold the balance to weigh the legitimacy of every prince.

But we no where find, except in the creeds which the priests have formed for themselves, that the laziness, the ignorance, and unreasonable demands of the priesthood should be supported; and on examination we discover that perpetual trickery and conjuration are at work among the priests to prevent the people from prying into the falsehood and chicanery of these organs of the divinity.

Do you not, then, conclude with me, that the interests of the sovereign accord not with the ministers of the Christian religion, who have, in all ages, been the most troublesome of the people among whom they have sprung up, the most rebellious, the most difficult to reduce to obedience, and whose satellites are too often the declared enemies of the person of the king? And it is thus that Christianity is the firmest support of the throne; that it regards kings as the express images of the divinity; that it addresses a worm of the dust with the title of the *Mightiest* and the *Highest*.

The maxims of the clergy are, however, best calculated to lull kings on the couch of slumber; they are calculated to flatter those on whom the clergy can rely,

and who will serve their ambition ; and their flatterers can soon change their tone, when the princes have the temerity to question the pernicious tendency of priestly influence. Then the prince is a heretic ; his destruction is laudable ; heaven rejoices in his overthrow. And all this is the religion of the Bible !

You know, Madam, that these odious maxims have been a thousand times enforced by the priests, who, when they have found themselves puzzled, have invariably replied, that the sovereign cannot encroach upon the authority of the church, since it is better to obey God than man.

The priests are devoted to the princes, when the princes are blindly led by the priests. These last preach arrogantly that the former ought to be exterminated, when they refuse to obey the church, that is to say, the priests ; yet how terrible soever may be these maxims, how dangerous soever their practice to the security of the sovereign, and the tranquillity of the state, they are the immediate consequences drawn from Judaism and Christianity. We find in the Old Testament that the regicide is applauded ; that treason and rebellion are approved. Why then should we suppose that God is offended with the thoughts of his creatures, that heretics are displeasing to him ? It is very natural to conclude, that if a sovereign be a heretic or impious, that is to say, if he disobeys the clergy, or opposes their views of aggrandizement, and is eventually successful in carrying his projects as David of old, or Henry VIII. in modern times, then the clergy conform to the king, who is now no longer a heretic, might being right, incapacity error, but the head of the church legitimately king, and the church and he are infallible ; the one can do no wrong ; and whoever does not conform to the other is incapable of enjoying the rights and privileges of a citizen.

You perceive then, Madam, that such conduct, though talked of by the priests, as founded on the prin-

ciples of their religion, their precepts are very much opposed to the surety of sovereigns, and the repose of nations. However, following these maxims, the life of the prince too often depends on the caprice of the priesthood, who may declare him a heretic, as has been done by the Pope in many instances, even to excommunication. And if the priesthood be flatterers of kings, they have been so to establish between themselves and those sovereigns a system of absolute power, which might secure to them an empire not only over the persons, but the consciences of the people. Whoever resists them is a rebel or a seditious person, or he is persecuted as a blasphemer.

On the other hand, the obedience of the clergy to their prince is only conditional. They will submit to him, they will flatter his whims, and strengthen his power, provided he submit to their orders, and do not traverse their projects, nor encroach on their livings, nor change any of their dogmas; but so soon as he attempts to contravene their sentiments, there is an open war, in which the victor is infallibly right, and the vanquished is necessarily wrong.

These considerations prove how dangerous are the priesthood, since the end they purpose by all their projects, is dominion over the mind of mankind, and by subjugating it, to enslave their persons, and render them the creatures of despotism and tyranny. And we shall find, upon examination, that, with one or two exceptions, the pious have been the enemies of the progress of science, and the developement of the human understanding; for by brutalizing mankind, they have invariably strove to bind them to their yoke. Their avarice, their thirst of power and wealth, have led them to plunge their fellow-citizens in ignorance, in misery, and unhappiness. They discourage the cultivation of the earth by their system of tythes, their extortions, and their secret projects; they annihilate activity, talents, and industry; their pride is to reign on the ruin of the rest of their species. The finest countries in

Europe have, when blindly submissive to the priests, been the worst cultivated, the thinnest peopled, and the most wretched. The *Inquisition* in Spain, Italy, and Portugal, has only tended to impoverish those countries to debase the mind, and render their subjects the veriest slaves of superstition. And in countries where we see heaven showering down abundance, the people are poor and famished, while the priests and monks are opulent and bloated. Their kings are without power and without glory ; their subjects languish in indigence and wretchedness.

The priests boast of the utility of their office. Independently of their prayers from which the world has for so many ages derived neither instruction nor peace, prosperity nor happiness ; their pretensions to teach the rising generations are often frivolous, and sometimes arrogant, since we have found others equally well calculated to the discharge of those functions, who have been good citizens, that have not drawn from the pockets of their neighbours the tenth of their earnings. Thus, in what light soever we view them, the pretensions of the priests are reduced to a non-entity, compared to the disservice they render the community by their exactions and dissolute lives.

If, then, the services of the clergy were properly appreciated, in place of immense revenues and princely power, their salaries would be on a par with the fees of empyrics, and their nostrums as highly valued. But I will only refer you to my former letters, in proof of this, and also in confirmation of their inutility in many concerns, in which they have contrived to push themselves, to the great detriment of society. They are very sensible, that as the human mind expands and frees itself from the prejudices of early eduction, their authority dwindles into nothingness. Their endeavour, then, is to mislead princes, by false charges against those who befriend mankind. Nevertheless, princes are actually interested in the progress of reason, and when they attempt to limit its range, they

only add to the means by which it always gains ground, and the more victims they immolate to the rage of the clergy, they erect the more steps on the portico of truth. But every state has its morning twilight of knowledge, its noon-day of science, and its evening of ignorance. The priests know which period suits them best, and that they are busiest in, like owls in the absence of the sun from a particular region of the earth.

You perceive, then, that in banishing philosophy, and repressing intellection, a government sacrifices the dearest interests of the people to a seditious priesthood, for there is not a single priest on earth who does not suppose himself equal to a king—who does not avow as high pretensions, and rule his flock with a despotism equal to that practised in Algiers.

The clergy are essentially the most wicked men of the state, and it requires something equal to a miracle to find one of them otherwise. They are the bantlings of minds in their dotage. Their pulpits are the anvils, whereon all that is destructive of the progress of intellect is hammered forth. Their pretended mission makes them redoubtable; the kindnesses of princes and people they conceive to be duties due to them as the messengers of heaven. Nor have I, in this portraiture, departed from the original; for during a long succession of ages, the clergy have contrived to sacrifice both princes and people to their avarice and passions. Else how happens it that they should become so rich, that princes should honour them with their confidence, and regard them as the props of their power, and the safeguards of their states? The chief aim of the priesthood is to cajole kings whom they may hold in slavery with the people.

Against all those who meddle with theological questions, the priests complain bitterly, and encourage their princes to side with them, and persecute those who do not submit; proscribe with fury all the friends of reason, and stifle liberal opinions which benefit society.

For those very priests who cry "sacrilege" when the princes meddle with their dogmas, or more properly their livings, are indignant against the same princes, when they refuse to destroy their enemies, or treat them as impious, when they stir not in religious broils.

We have seen some bend their power to the bettering of their people, and the dissemination of knowledge among them ; but we have seen the clergy oppose those princes, by a zeal that could result from nothing but their self-interest, which is always increased in proportion as they propagate their mystical jargon, and secure believers to their fanatical practices.

What do we behold useful to society in the monuments of piety furnished by the lives of the priests ? We find the most fantastical notions maintained of a lazy monastic life ; temples and palaces for the heads of the church, enriched by the hard-earned labours of the poor ; for since the establishment of Christianity, the sacerdotal power has been raised on the ruin of nations, and the annihilation of every prince who dared to oppose it. A jealous religion is exclusively calculated to cramp the minds of men, and keep them in terror and suspense. . And we see in all ages that the interests of the clergy are incompatible with those of the people. In every state, therefore, in which the interests of one class of the community is at variance with those of other classes, disorder, arising from discontent and misery from indifference, must be the consequences. This is also the case where the blind lead the blind.

I am, Madam, &c.

LETTER X.

I DARE flatter myself, Madam, that I have clearly demonstrated to you, that the Christian religion, far from being the support of sovereign authority, is its greatest enemy ; and of having plainly convinced you, that its ministers are, by the very nature of their functions, the rivals of kings, and adversaries the most to be feared by all who value or exercise temporal power. In a word, I think I have persuaded you, that society could better dispense with the services of the priesthood, than it could with the purse of society ; and that of the two classes, the priests are less beneficial to the state than the labouring poor.

Let us now examine the advantages which this religion procures to individuals, who are most strongly convinced of its pretended truths, and who conform the most rigidly to its precepts. Let us see if it is calculated to render its disciples more content, more happy, and more virtuous than they would be without the burden of its ministers.

In order to decide this question, we have only to look around us, and consider the effects which this religion produces in minds truly penetrated with its pretended truths. We usually find in all those who profess it the most sincerely, and who practise it the most exactly, chagrin and melancholy, which announce plainly, that they derive no internal peace from that, about which they talk incessantly ; and we have found some of them confess, that while they are obliged to appear to the world as contented and happy, they are internally the victims of a secret inquietude.

Whoever shall meditate seriously on the God of the Old Testament, will be convinced how much licence the priests and their followers have, from the despotic and tyrannical character of their Deity, to be overbearing in their exterior, and the slaves of fear within

True, the doctrine of predestination is a panacea for all crimes, but then what a number of human beings it sends to the devil, merely because they did not do what they could not do ! Even the worker of good works has no hope from them, unless he can persuade himself that he is one of the elect ; while the true believer in this doctrine cannot fail to get into heaven, be his sins what they may.

There is little occasion, however, Madam, to insist on this topic with you ; yet I may glance at the continual melange of devotion and pleasure, of piety and dissipation, of momentary fervour and continued derangement, which the priests and their devotees offer to the world. If priests fast, it is from pride and ambition ; their principles are not better, nor are their passions weaker than those of other men. Their severities are stoicism blended occasionally with fanaticism ; for they are enemies to the refined pleasures of mind, and their unsociability proves them to be the victims of chagrin. Their jealousy, in fact, compels them to interdict harmless pastimes, which both God and Nature allow.

May we not, then, conclude, that the religion of these priests is not designed for beings who have to fulfil the duties of society ; its precepts are often impracticable ; they check activity, and render the complacent frequently morose and disagreeable. For a Christian is forced to abstract his maxims or himself from them, if he would live on a footing with other men. Interest and emulation bid him set the dogmas of his priest aside ; and he does so, but is furnished with a panacea in the event of offending God, a salvo for the sins of omission and commission. In a word, a good Christian is a man of another, not of this world.

Thus we see, that Christians, to belong to the great family of mankind, are every moment compelled to depart from their supernatural speculations. Their passions necessitate them to compromise their tenets,

which have not force to extirpate the springs of human nature, as various as the circumstances and objects that solicit observation, and claim a share in the round of pastime man has pleasure in enjoying.

I believe, Madam, that you will now be convinced that the true friends of the human kind and of princes are not the friends of the priesthood. But what are the motives which determine a man to incredulity? Yet is incredulity not that which pretends to domineer over the conscience; it furnishes no pretexts for violating the laws of the understanding; it teaches none to hate and despise men on account of their opinions, at least not of opinions which carry to evil tendency in their practice. The motives, then, for incredulity, as in my case, are infinite, and I do not know that I am either more just or more depraved than other men, but I am confident I entertain no persecuting spirit.

The incredulous who reflect, perceive, that without abandoning society, they have pressing and real motives which invite them to be honest men and good citizens; they understand that reciprocal interest which is the first law of nature; they strive to render themselves agreeable to all, from a principle of justice, and they injure none from a conviction of the utility of personal virtue; they obey the laws, because good laws are for the protection of the good, and the chastisement of the bad. They have a perfect idea of the beauty of decency, and the propriety of good order; they devise to merit the appellation of their fellow-citizens; they fear to incur their disapprobation or censure. And such are some of the motives which actuate the incredulous, on which the conduct of the free-thinker is grounded.

But you may rejoin, "And are all the incredulous such as you have pourtrayed?" The partizans of the Christians have, I believe, found as little to censure in the conduct of the incredulous, as in their own companions in fanaticism. But the incredulous do not appeal to supernatural aid and divine instruction for

the propriety of their conduct ; the credulous do so appeal, and there is no question that, if they evinced in their lives the perfection they boast as attainable by their religion, the whole world would follow them in devotion. A happy temperament, an honest education, the desire to live peaceably, the fear of incurring blame, the habitude of doing always good, and thinking well of mankind, furnish motives for the incredulous to abstain from vice, and practise virtue. Besides, they have an inexhaustible fund of motives which religion does not furnish to the superstitious, who, when they have crimes to expiate, reconcile themselves to God, and set their conscience at rest. The incredulous man, who does wrong, cannot reconcile himself to society, nor with his own mind ; and if he has no hope of recompense in another life, but from the good he does in this, he must of necessity practise virtue and probity.

It appears obvious, that all men who consult their reason, ought to be more reasonable than those who consult only their imagination ; that those who consult well their own nature, ought to have more correct ideas of good and evil, of justice and injustice, of honesty and dishonesty, than those who consult a vague theology, and incomprehensible mysteries. The incredulous do the former ; the credulous, I mean the Christians, do the latter ; and I shall therefore conclude this letter by requesting you will use your own judgment in examining on which class your happiness bids you arrange yourself.

I am, Madam, &c.

LETTER XI.

By this time, Madam, you will have reflected on what I had the honour to address to you ; and perceived how impossible it is to found a certain and invariable morality on a religion enthusiastic, ambiguous, mysterious, and contradictory, and which never agreed with itself. You know that the God who appears to have taken pleasure in rendering himself unintelligible, that the God who is partial and changeable, that the God whose precepts are at variance one with another, can never serve as the base on which to rear a morality that shall become practicable among the inhabitants of the earth. In short, how can we found justice and goodness on attributes that are unjust and evil ; yet attributes of a Being who tempts man, whom he created, for the purpose of punishing him when tempted ? How can we know when we do the will of a God, who has said, *Thou shalt not kill*, and who yet allows his people to exterminate whole nations ? What idea can we form of the morality of that God, who declares himself pleased with the sanguinary conduct of Moses, of the rebel, the assassin, the adulterer David ? Is it possible to found the holy duties of humanity on a God, whose favourites have been inhuman persecutors and cruel monsters ? How can we deduce our duties from the lessons of the priests of a God of peace, who, nevertheless, breathes only sedition, vengeance, and carnage ? How can we take as models for our conduct *saints*, who were useless enthusiasts, or turbulent fanatics, or seditious apostates ; who, under the pretext of defending the cause of God, have stirred up the greatest ravages on the earth ? What wholesome morality can we reap from the adoption of impracticable virtues, from their being supernatural, which are visibly useless to ourselves, to those among whom we live, and in their consequences

often dangerous? How can we take as guides in our conduct priests, whose lessons are a tissue of unintel-
ble opinions (*for all religion is but opinion*), puerile
and frivolous practices, which these gentlemen prefer
to real virtues? In fine, how can we be taught *the
truth*, conducted in an unerring path, by men of a
changeable morality, calculated upon and actuated by
their present interests, and who although they pretend
to preach good-will to men, humanity, and peace,
have, as their text book, a volume stained with the
records of injustice, inhumanity, sedition, and per-
fidy?

You know, Madam, that it is impossible to found
morality on notions that are so unfixed and so con-
trary to all our natural ideas of virtue. By virtue we
ought to understand the habitual dispositions to do
whatever will procure us the happiness of ourselves
and our species. By virtue, religion understands only
that which may contribute to render us favourable to a
hidden God, who attaches his favour to practices and
opinions that are too often hurtful to ourselves, and
little beneficial to others. The morality of the Chris-
tians is a mystic morality, which resembles the dog-
mas of their religion; it is obscure, unintelligible,
uncertain, and subject to the interpretation of frail
creatures. This morality is never fixed, because it is
subordinate to a religion which varies incessantly its
principles, and which is regulated according to the
pleasure of a despotic divinity, and, more especially,
according to the pleasure of priests whose interests are
changing daily, whose caprices are as variable as the
hours of their existence, and who are, consequently,
not always in agreement with one another.

The writings which are the sources whence the
Christians have drawn their morality, are not only an
abyss of obscurity, but demand continual explications
from their masters, the priests, who, in explaining,
make them still more obscure, still more contradic-
tory. If these oracles of heaven prescribe to us in one

place the virtues truly useful, in another part they approve, or prescribe, actions entirely opposed to all the ideas that we have of virtue. The same God who orders us to be good, equitable, and beneficent, who forbids the revenging of injuries, who declares himself to be the God of clemency and of goodness—shews himself to be as implacable in his rage, announces himself as bringing *the sword, and not peace* : tells us that he is come to set mankind at variance ; and finally, in order to revenge his wrongs, orders rapine, treason, usurpation and carnage. In a word, it is impossible to find in the scriptures any certain principles, or sure rules of morality. You there see in one part a small number of precepts useful and intelligible, and in another part maxims the most extravagant and the most destructive to the good and happiness of all society.

It is in punctuality to fulfil the superstitious and frivolous duties, that the morality of the Jews in the Old Testament writings is chiefly conspicuous ; legal observances, rites, ceremonies, are all that occupied the people of Israel. In recompence for their scrupulous exactness to fulfil these duties, they were permitted to commit the most frightful of crimes. The virtues recommended by the Son of God, in the New Testament, are not in reality, the same as those which God the Father had made observable in the former case. The New Testament contradicts the Old. It announces that God is not pacified by sacrifices, nor by offerings, nor by frivolous rites. It substitutes in place of these, supernatural virtues, of which I believe I have sufficiently proved the inutility, the impossibility, and the incompatibility with the well-being of man living in society. The Son of God, by the writers of the New Testament, is set at variance with himself ; for he destroys in one place what he establishes in another ; and moreover, the priests have appropriated to themselves all the principles of his mission. They are in unison only with God when the pro-

cepts of the Deity accord with their present interest. Is it their interest to persecute? They find that God ordains persecution. Are they themselves persecuted? They find that this pacific God forbids persecution, and views with abhorrence the persecution of his servants. Do they find that superstitious practices are lucrative to themselves? Notwithstanding the aversion of Jesus Christ from offerings, rites and ceremonies, they impose them on the people, they surcharge them with mysterious rites: they respect these more than those duties which are of essential benefit to society. If Jesus has not wished that they should avenge themselves, they find that his Father has delighted in vengeance. If Jesus has declared that his kingdom is not of this world, and if he has shewn contempt of riches, they nevertheless find in the Old Testament, sufficient reasons for establishing a hierarchy for the governing of the world in a spiritual sense, as kings do in a political one,— for the disputing with kings about their power,— for exercising in this world, an authority the most unlimited, a licence the most terrific. In a word, if they have found in the Bible, some precepts of a moral tendency and practical utility, they have also found others to justify crimes the most atrocious.

Thus, in the Christian religion, morality uniformly depends on the fanaticism of priests, their passions, their interests: its principles are never fixed, they vary according to circumstances; the God of whom they are the organs, and the interpreters, has not said any thing but what agrees best with their views and what never contravenes their interest. Following their caprices, he changes his advice continually; he approves, and disapproves, of the same actions; he loves, or detests, the same conduct, he changes crime into virtue, and virtue into crime.

What is the result from all this? It is that the Christians have not sure principles in morality: it varies with the policy of the priests, who are in a situation to command the credulity of mankind, and who

by force of menaces and terrors oblige men to shut their eyes on their contradictions, and minds the most honest to commit faults the greatest which can be committed against religion. It is thus that under a God who recommends the love of our neighbour, the Christians accustom themselves from infancy to detest an heretical neighbour, and are almost always in a disposition to overwhelm him by a crowd of arguments received from their priests. It is thus that, under a God who ordains we should love our enemies and forgive their offences, the Christians hate and destroy the enemies of their priests, and take vengeance, without measure, for injuries which they pretend to have received. It is thus, that under a just God, and who never ceases to boast of his goodness, the Christians, at the signal of their spiritual guides, become unjust and cruel, and make a merit of having stifled the cries of nature, the voice of humanity, the counsels of wisdom, and of public interest.

In a word, all the ideas of justice and of injustice, of good and evil, of happiness and of misfortune, are necessarily confounded in the head of a Christian. His despotic priest commands him in the name of God to put no reliance on his reason, and the man who is compelled to abandon it for the guidance of a troubled imagination, will be far more likely to consult and admit the most stupid fanaticism as the inspiration of the Most High. In his blindness, he casts at his feet duties the most sacred, and he believes himself virtuous in outraging every virtue. Has he remorse? his priest appeases it speedily, and points out some easy practices by which he may soon recommend himself to God. Has he committed injustice, violence, and rapine? he may repair all by giving to the church the goods of which he has despoiled worthy citizens; or by repaying by largesses, which will procure him the prayers of the priests and the favour of heaven. For the priests never reproach men who give them of this world's goods, of the injustice, the cruelties, and the crimes they have been guilty, to support the church

and be friend her ministers ; the faults which have almost always been found the most unpardonable, have always been those of most disservice to the clergy. To question the faith and reject the authority of the priesthood, have always been the most frightful crimes ; they are truly the sin against the Holy Ghost, which can never be forgiven either in this world or in that which is to come. To despise these objects which the priests have an interest in making to be respected, is sufficient to qualify one for the appellation of a blasphemer and an impious man. These vague words, void of sense, suffice to excite horror in the mind of the weak vulgar. The terrible word sacrilege, designates an attempt on the person, the goods, and the rights of the clergy. The omission of some useless practice is exaggerated and represented as a crime more detestable than actions which injure society. In favour of fidelity to fulfil the duties of religion, the priest easily pardons his slave submitting to vices, criminal debaucheries, and excesses the most horrible. You perceive then, Madam, that the Christian morality has really in view but the utility of the priests. Why then should you be surprised that they endeavour to make themselves arbitrary and sovereign ; that they deem as faults and as criminal, all the virtues which agree not with their marvellous systems. The Christian morality appears only to have been proposed to blind men, to disturb their reason, to render them abject and timid, to plunge them into vassalage, to make them lose sight of the earth which they inhabit, for visions of bliss in heaven. By the aid of this morality the priests have become the true masters here below ; they have imagined virtues and practices useful only to themselves ; they have procribed and interdicted those which were truly useful to society ; they have made slaves of their disciples, who make virtue to consist in blind submission to their caprices.

To lay the foundations of a good morality, it is absolutely necessary to destroy the prejudices which the

priests have inspired in us ; it is necessary to begin by rendering the mind of man energetic, and freeing it from those vain terrors which have enthralled it ; it is necessary to renounce those supernatural notions which have till now hindered men from consulting the volume of nature, which have subjected reason to the yoke of authority ; it is necessary to encourage man, to undeceive him as to those prejudices which have enslaved him ; to annihilate in his bosom those false theories which corrupt his nature, and which are in fact, infidel guides destructive of the real happiness of the species. It is necessary to undeceive him as to the idea of his loathing himself, and especially that other idea that some of his fellow creatures are not to labour with their hands for their support, but in spiritual matters for his happiness. In fine, it is necessary to influence him with self love, that he may merit the esteem of the world, the benevolence and consideration of those with whom he is associated by the ties of nature or public economy.

The morality of religion appears calculated to confound society and to replunge its members into the savage state. The christian virtues tend evidently to isolate man, to detach him from those to whom nature has united him, and to unite him to the priests ; to make him lose sight of a happiness the most solid, to occupy himself only with dangerous chimeras. We only live in society to procure the more easily those kindnesses, succours, and pleasures, which we could not obtain living by ourselves. If it had been destined that we should live miserably in this world, that we should detest ourselves, fly the esteem of others, voluntarily afflict ourselves, have no attachment for any one,—society would have been one heap of confusion, the human kind savages and strangers to one another.

However, if it is true that God is the author of man it is God who renders man sociable ; it is God who wishes man to live in society where he can obtain the greatest good. If God is good, he cannot approve

that men should leave society to become miserable; if God is the author of reason, he can only wish that men who are possessed of reason should employ this distinguishing gift to procure for themselves all the happiness its exercise can bring them. If God has revealed himself, it is not in some obscure way, but in a revelation the most evident and clear of all those supposed revelations, which are visibly contrary to all the notions we can form of the divinity.

We are not however obliged to dive into the marvellous to establish the duties man owes to man; since God has very plainly shown them in the wants of one and the good offices of another person. But it is only by consulting our reason that we can arrive at the means of contributing to the felicity of our species. It is then evident that in regarding man as the creature of God,—God must have designed that man should consult his reason, that it might procure him the most solid happiness, and those principles of virtue which nature approves.

What then might not our opinions be, were we to substitute the morality of reason for the morality of religion? In place of a partial and reserved morality for a small number of men, let us substitute an universal morality, intelligible to all the inhabitants of the earth, and of which all can find the principles in nature. Let us study this nature, its wants and its desires; let us examine the means of satisfying it: let us consider what is the end of our existence in society,—we shall see that all those who are thus associated, are compelled by their natures to practise affection one to another, benevolence, esteem and relief, if desired; we shall see what is that line of conduct which necessarily excites hatred, ill-will, and all those misfortunes which experience makes familiar to mankind; our reason will tell us what actions are the most calculated to excite real happiness and good will, the most solid and extensive; let us weigh these with those that are founded on visionary theories; their

difference will at once be perceptible ; the advantages which are permanent we will not sacrifice for those that are momentary ; we will employ all our faculties to augment the happiness of our species ; we will labour with perseverance and courage to extirpate evil from the earth ; we will assist as much as we can, those who are without friends ; we will seek to alleviate their distresses and their pains ; we will merit their regard, and thus fulfil the end of our being on earth.

In conducting ourselves in this manner, our reason prescribes a morality agreeable to nature, reasonable to all, constant in its operation, effective in its exercise in benefiting all, in contributing to the happiness of society, collectively and individually, in distinction to the mysticism preached up by priests. We shall find in our reason and in our nature the surest guides, superior to the clergy who only teach us to benefit themselves. We shall thus enjoy a morality as durable as the race of man. We shall have precepts founded on the necessity of things ; that will punish those transgressing them, and rewarding those who obey them. Every man who shall prove himself to be just, useful, beneficent, will be an object of love to his fellow citizens ; every man who shall prove himself unjust, useless and wicked, will become an object of hatred to himself as well as to others ; he will be forced to tremble at the violation of the laws ; he will be compelled to do that which is good to gain the good will of mankind and preserve the regard of those who have the power of obliging him to be an useful member of the state.

Thus, Madam, if it should be demanded of you, what you would substitute for the benefit of society in place of visionary reveries ? I reply a sensible morality, a good education, profitable habits, self-evident principles of duty, wise laws which even the wicked cannot misunderstand, but which may correct their evil purposes, and recompenses that may tend to the promotion of virtue. The education of the present day tends only

to make youth the slaves of superstition, the virtues which it inculcates on them are only those of fanaticism, to render the mind subject to the priests for the remainder of life; the motives to duty are only fictitious and imaginary; the rewards and punishments which it exhibits in an obscure glimmering, produce no other effect than to make useless enthusiasts and dangerous fanatics. The principles on which enthusiasm establishes morality are changing and ruinous; those on which the morality of reason is established are fixed, and cannot be overturned. Seeing then that man, a reasonable being, should be chiefly occupied about his preservation and happiness, that he should love virtue; that he should be sensible of its advantages, that he should fear the consequences of crime, is it to be wondered I should insist so much on the practice of virtue as his chief good? Men ought to hate crime, because it leads to misery. Society to exist must receive the united virtue of its members, obedience to good laws, the activity and intelligence of citizens to defend its privileges and its rights. Laws are good when they invite the members of society to labour for reciprocal good offices. Laws are just when they recompense or punish in proportion to the good or evil which is done to society. Laws supported by a visible authority should be founded on present motives; and thus they would have more force than those of religion which are founded on uncertain motives, imaginary and removed from this world, and which experience proves cannot suffice to curb the passions of bad men, nor shew them their duty by the fear of punishments after death.

If in place of stifling human reason, as is too much done, its perfectibility were studied; if in place of deluging the world with visionary notions, truth were inculcated; if in place of pleading a supernatural morality, a morality agreeable to humanity and resulting from experience were preached, we should no longer be the dupes of imaginary theories, nor of terrifying

fables as the bases of virtue. Every one would then perceive that it is to the practice of virtue, to the faithful observation of the duties of morality, that the happiness of individuals and of society is to be traced. Is he a husband? he will perceive that his essential happiness is to shew kindness, attachment, and tenderness to the companion of his life, destined by his own choice to share his pleasures and endure his misfortunes. And on the other hand, she, by consulting her true interests, will perceive that they consist in rendering homage to her husband, in interdicting every thought that could alienate her affections, diminish her esteem and confidence in him. Fathers and mothers will perceive, that their children are destined to be one day their consolation and support in old age; and that by consequence they have the greatest interest in inspiring them, in early life, with sentiments of which they may themselves reap the benefit when age or misfortune may require the fruits of those advantages that result from a good education. Their children, early taught to reflect on these things, will find their interest to lie in meriting the kindness of their parents, and in giving them proofs that the virtues they are taught will be communicated to their posterity. The master will perceive, that to be served with affection, he owes good will, kindness, and indulgence, to those at whose hands he would reap advantages, and by whose labour he would increase his prosperity; and servants will discover how much their happiness depends on fidelity, industry, and good temper in their situations. Friends will find the advantages of a kindred heart for friendship; and the reciprocity of good offices. The members of the same family will perceive the necessity of preserving that union which nature has established among them; to render mutual benefits in prosperity or in adversity. Societies, if they reflect on the end of their association, will perceive, that to secure it they must observe good faith and punctuality in their engagements. The citizen, when he consults his reason,

will perceive how much it is necessary, for the good of the nation to which he belongs, that he should exert himself to advance its prosperity or in its misfortunes to retrieve its glory. By consequence every one in his sphere, and using his faculties for this great end, will find his own advantage in restraining the bad as dangerous and opposing enemies to the state, as enemies to himself.

In a word, every man who will reflect for himself will be compelled to acknowledge the necessity of virtue for the happiness of the world. It is so obvious that justice is the basis of all society; that good will and good offices necessarily procure for men affection and respect; that every man who respects himself ought to seek the esteem of others; that it is necessary to merit the good opinion of society; that he ought to be jealous of his reputation; that a weak being who is every instant exposed to misfortunes, ought to know what are his duties, and how he should practise them for the benefit of himself and the assembly of which he is a member.

If we reflect for one moment on the effects of the passions, we shall perceive the necessity of repressing them, if we would spare ourselves vain regrets and useless sorrows, which certainly always afflict those who obey not the laws. Thus, a single reflection will suffice to shew the impropriety of anger, the dreadful consequences of revenge, calumny, and backbiting. Anger is madness; it is the child of folly, the enemy of society.

If the man who consults his reason has real and powerful motives for doing good to others and abstaining from injuring them, he has present motives equally urgent to restrain him from the commission of vice. Experience may suffice to shew him that if he become sooner or later the victim of his excesses, he ceases to be the friend of virtue, and exists only to serve vice which will infallibly punish him. This being allowed, prudence, or the desire of preserving one's self free from the contamination of evil, ought to indicate to

every man his path of duty; and, unless blinded by his passions, he must perceive how much moderation in his pleasures, temperance, chastity, contribute to happiness; that those who transgress in these respects are necessarily the victims of ill-health, and too often pass a life both infirm and unfortunate, which terminates soon in death.

How is it possible then, Madam, from visionary theories to arrive at these conclusions, and establish from supernatural fancies the principles of private and public virtue. Shall we launch into unknown regions to ascertain our duty and to keep our station in society. Is it not sufficient if we wish to be happy that we should endeavour to preserve ourselves in those maxims which reason approves, and on which virtue is founded? Every man who would perish, who would render his existence miserable, whoever would sacrifice permanent happiness for present pleasure is a fool, who reflects not on the interests that are dearest to him.

If there are any principles so clear as the morality of humanity has been and is still proved to be, they are such as men ought to observe. They are not obscure notions, mysticism, contradictions, which have made of a science the most obvious and best demonstrated, an unintelligible science, mysterious and uncertain to those for whom it is designed. In the hands of the priests, morality has become an enigma; they have founded our duties on the attributes of a deity whom the mind of man cannot comprehend, in place of founding them on the character of man himself. They have thrown in among them the foundations of an edifice which is made for this earth. They have desired to regulate our manners agreeably to equivocal oracles which every instant contradict themselves, and which too often render their devotees useless to society and to themselves. They have pretended to render their morality more sacred by inviting us to look for recompenses and punishments removed beyond this life, but

which they announce in the name of the divinity. In fine, they have made man a being who may not even strive at perfection, by a preordination of some to bliss, and consequent damnation of others, whose insensibility is the result of this selection.

Need we not then wonder that this supernatural morality should be so contrary to the nature and the mind of man? It is in vain that it aims at the annihilation of human nature which is so much stronger, so much more powerful than imagination. In despite of all the subtle and marvellous speculations of the priests, man continues always to love himself, to desire his well being, and to flee misfortune and sorrow. He has then always been actuated by the same passions. When these passions have been moderate and have tended to the public good they are legitimate, and we approve those actions which are their effects. When these passions have been disordered, hurtful to society, or to the individual, he condemns them; they punish him; he is dissatisfied with his conduct which others cannot approve. Man always loves his pleasures, because in their enjoyment he fulfils the end of his existence; if he exceeds their just bounds he renders himself miserable.

The morality of the clergy, on the other hand, appears calculated to keep nature always at variance with herself, for it is almost always without effect even on the priesthood. Their chimeras serve but to torture weak minds, and to set the passions at war with nature and their dogmas. When this morality professes to restrain the wicked, to curb the passions of men, it operates in opposition to the established laws of natural religion; for by preserving all its rigour, it becomes impracticable; and it meets with real devotees only in some few fanatics who renounced nature, and who would be singular, even if their oddities were injurious to society. This morality adapted for the most part by devotees, without eradicating their habits or their natural defects, keeps them always in a state of

opposition even with themselves. Their life is a round of faults and of scruples, of sins and remorse, of crimes and expiations, of pleasures which they enjoy, but for which they again reproach themselves for having tasted. In a word the morality of superstition necessarily carries with it into the heart and the family of its devotees; inward distress and affliction; it makes of enthusiasts and fanatics, scrupulous devotees; it makes a great many insensible and miserable; it renders none perfect, few good; and those only tolerable whom nature, education, and habit had moulded for happiness.

It is our temperament which decides our condition; the acquisition of moderate passions, of honest habits, sensible opinions, laudable examples, and practical virtues, is a difficult task, but not impossible when undertaken with reason for one's guide. It is difficult to be virtuous and happy with a temperament so ardent as to sway the passions to its will. One must in calmness consult reason as to his duty. Nature, in giving us lively passions and a susceptible imagination has made us capable of suffering the instant we transgress her bounds. She then renders us necessary to ourselves, and we cannot proceed to consult our real interest if we continue in indulgence that she forbids. The passions which reason cannot restrain are not to be bridled by religion. It is in vain that we hope to derive succours from religion, if we despise and refuse what nature offers us. Religion leaves men just such as nature and habit have made them: and if it produce any changes on some few, I believe I have proved that those changes are not always for the better.

Congratulate yourself then, Madam, on being born with good dispositions, of having received honest principles which shall carry you through life in the practice of virtue, and in the love of a fine and exalted taste for the rational pleasures of our nature. Continue to be the happiness of your family, which esteems and honours you. Continue to diffuse around you

the blessings you enjoy ; continue to perform only those actions which are esteemed by all the world, and all men will respect you. Respect yourself, and others will respect you. These are the legitimate sentiments of virtue and of happiness. Labour for your own happiness, and you will promote that of your family, who will love you in proportion to the good you do it. Allow me to congratulate myself, if in all I have said, I have in any measure swept from your mind those clouds of fanaticism which obscure the reason ; and to felicitate you on your having escaped from vague theories of imagination. Abjure superstition, which is calculated only to make you miserable ; let the morality of humanity be your uniform religion ; that your happiness may be constant, let reason be your guide ; that virtue may be the idol of your soul, cultivate and love only what is virtuous and good in the world ; and if there be a God, who is interested in the happiness of his creatures ; if there be a God, full of justice and goodness, he will not be angry with you for having consulted your reason ; if there be another life, your happiness in it cannot be doubtful, if God rewards every one according to the good done here.

I am, with respect, &c.

LETTER XII.

PERMIT me, Madam, to felicitate you on the happy change which you say has taken place in your opinions. Convinced by reasons as simple as obvious, your mind has become sensible of the futility of those notions which have for a long time agitated it; and the inefficacy of those pretended succours which religious men boasted they could furnish, is now apparent to you. You perceive the evident dangers which result from a system that serves only to render men enemies to individual and general happiness.

I see with pleasure that reason has not lost its authority over your mind; and that it is sufficient to shew you the truth that you may embrace it. You may congratulate yourself on this, which proves the solidity of your judgment. For it is glorious to give one's self up to reason, and to be the votary of common sense. Prejudice so arms mankind, that the world is full of people who slight their judgment; nay, who resist the most obvious pleas of their understanding. Their eyes long shut to the light of truth, are unable to bear its rays; but they can endure the glimmerings of superstition, which plunges them in still darker obscurity.

I am not, however, astonished at the embarrassment you have hitherto felt, nor at your cautious examination of my opinions, which are better understood the more thoroughly they are examined and compared with those they oppose. It is impossible to annihilate at once deep-rooted prejudices. The mind of man appears to waver in a void, when those ideas are attacked on which it has long rested. It finds itself in a new world, wherein all is unknown. Every system of opinions is but the effect of habit. The mind has as great difficulty to disengage itself from its custom of thinking, and reflect on new ideas, as the body has

to remain quiescent after it has long been accustomed to exercise. Should you, for instance, propose to your friend to leave off snuff, as a practice neither healthful nor agreeable in company, he will not probably listen to you, or if he should, it will be with extreme pain that he can bring himself to renounce a habit long familiarized to him.

It is precisely the same with all our prejudices; those of religion have the most powerful hold of us. From infancy we have been familiarized with them; habit has made them a sort of want we cannot dispense with; our mode of thinking is formed, and familiar to us; our mind is accustomed to engage itself with certain classes of objects; and our imagination fancies that it wanders in chaos when it is not fed with those chimeras to which it had been long accustomed. Fantoms, the most horrible, are even clear to it; objects the most familiar to it, if viewed with the calm eye of reason, are disagreeable and revolting.

Religion, or rather its superstitions, in consequence of the marvellous and bizzare notions it engenders, gives the mind continual exercise; and its votaries fancy they are doomed to a dangerous inaction when they are suddenly deprived of the objects on which their imagination exerted its powers. Yet is this exercise so much the more necessary as the imagination is by far the most lively faculty of the mind. Hence, without doubt, it becomes necessary, men should replace stale fooleries by those which are novel. This is, moreover, the true reason why devotion so often affords consolation in great disgraces, gives diversion for chagrin, and replaces the strongest passions, when they have been quenched by excess of pleasure and dissipation. The marvellous arguments, chimeras multiply as religion furnishes activity and occupation to the fancy; habit renders them familiar, and even necessary; terrors themselves, even minister food to the imagination; and religion, the religion of priestcraft, is full of terrors. Active and unquiet spirits conti-

nally requires this nourishment ; the imagination requires to be alternately alarmed and consoled ; and there are thousands who cannot accustom themselves to tranquillity, and the sobriety of reason. Many persons also require fictions to make them religious, and they find these succours in the dogmas of priestcraft.

These reflections will serve to explain to you the continual variations to which many persons are subject, especially on the subject of religion. Sensible, like barometers, you behold them wavering without ceasing ; their imagination floats, and is never fixed : so often as you find them freely given up to the blackness of superstition, so often may you behold them the slaves of pernicious prejudices. Whenever they tremble at the feet of their priests, then are their necks under the yoke. Even people of spirit and understanding in other affairs, are not altogether exempt from these variations of mental religious temperament ; but their judgment is too frequently the dupe of the imagination. And others, again, timid and doubting, without spirit, are in perpetual torment.

What do I say ? Man is not, and cannot always be the same. His frame is exposed to revolutions and perpetual vicissitudes ; the thoughts of his mind necessarily vary with the different degrees of changes to which his body is exposed. When the body is languid and fatigued, the mind has not usually much inclination to vigour and gaiety. The debility of the nerves commonly annihilates the energies of the soul, although it be so remarkably distinguished from the body ; persons of a bilious and melancholy temperament, are rarely the subjects of joy ; dissipation importunes some, gaiety fatigues others. Exactly after the same fashion, there are some who love to nourish sombre ideas, and these, religion supplies them. Devotion affects them like the vapours ; superstition is an inveterate malady, for which there is no cure in medicine. And it is impossible to keep him free from superstition whose breast, the slave of fear, was never

sensible of courage; nay, soldiers and sailors, the bravest of men, have too often been the victims of superstition. It is education alone that operates in radically curing the human mind of its errors.

Those who think it sufficient, Madam, to render a reason for the variations which we so frequently remark in the ideas of men, acknowledge that there is a secret bent of the minds of religious persons to prejudices, from which we shall almost in vain endeavour to rescue their understandings. You perceive, at present, what you ought to think of those secret transitions which our priest would force on you, as the inspirations of Heaven, as divine solicitations, the effects of grace; though they are, nevertheless, only the effects of those vicissitudes to which our constitution is liable, and which affect the robust, as well as the feeble; the man of health, as well as the valetudinarian.

If we might form a judgment of the correctness of those notions which our teachers boast of, in respect to our dissolution at death, we shall find reason to be satisfied, that there is little or no occasion that we should have our minds disturbed during our last moments. It is then, say they, that it is necessary to attend to the condition of man; it is then that man, undeceived as to the things of this life, acknowledges his errors. But there is, perhaps, no idea in the whole circle of theology more unreasonable than this, of which the credulous, in all ages, have been the dupes. Is it not at the time of a man's dissolution, that he is the least capable of judging of his true interest? His bodily frame racked, it may be, with pain; his mind is necessarily weakened or chafed; or if he should be free from excruciating pain, the lassitude and yielding of nature to the irrevocable decrees of fate at death, unfit a man for reasoning and judging of the sophisms that are proposed as panaceas for all his errors. There are, without doubt, as strange notions as those of religion; but who knows that body and soul sink alike at death?

It is in the case of health that we can promise our-

selves to reason with justness ; it is then that the soul, neither troubled by fear, nor altered by disease, nor led astray by passion, can judge soundly of what is beneficial to man. The judgments of the dying can have no weight with men in good health ; and they are the veriest impostors who lend them belief. The truth can alone be known, when both body and mind are in good health. No man, without evincing an insensible and ridiculous presumption, can answer for the ideas he is occupied with, when worn out with sickness and disease ; yet have the inhuman priests the effrontery to persuade the credulous to take as their examples the words and actions of men, necessarily deranged in intellect, by the derangement of their corporeal frame. In short, since the ideas of men necessarily vary with the different variations of their bodies, the man who presumes to reason on his death-bed with the man in health, arrogates what ought not to be conceded.

Do not then, Madam, be discouraged nor surprised, if you should sometimes think of ancient prejudices reclaiming the rights they have for a long time exercised over your reason ; attribute then these vacillations to some derangement in your frame—to some disordered movements of mind, which, for a time, suspend your reason. Think that there are few people who are constantly the same, and who see with the same eyes. Our frame being subject to continual variations, it necessarily follows that our modes of thinking will vary. We think one custom the result of pusillanimity, when the nerves are relaxed, and our bodies fatigued. We think justly when our body is in health, that is to say, when all its parts are fulfilling their various functions. There is one mode of thinking, or one state of mind, which in health we call uncertainty, and which we rarely experience, when our frame is in its ordinary condition. We do not then reason justly, when our frame is not in a condition to leave our mind subject to incredulity.

What then is to be done, when we would calm our

mind, when we wish to reflect, even for an instant? Let reason be our guide, and we shall soon arrive at that mode of thinking, which shall be advantageous to ourselves. In effect, Madam, how can a God who is just, good, and reasonable, be irritated by the manner in which we shall think, seeing that our thoughts are always involuntary, and that we cannot believe as we would, but as our convictions encrease, or become weakened. Man is not then for one instant the master of his ideas, which are every moment excited by objects over which he has no controul, and causes which depend not on his will or exertions. St. Augustine himself bears testimony to this truth: "There is not," says he, "one man who is at all times master of that which presents itself to his spirit."—Have we not, then, good reason to conclude, that our thoughts are entirely indifferent to God, seeing they are excited by objects over which we have no controul, and by consequence that they cannot be offensive to the Deity.

If our teachers pique themselves on their principles, they ought to carry along with them this truth, that a just God cannot be offended by the changes which take place in the minds of his creatures. They ought to know that this God, if he is wise, has no occasion to be troubled with the ideas that enter the mind of man; that if they do not comprehend all his perfections, it is because their comprehension is limited. They ought to recollect, that if God is all powerful, his glory and his power cannot be affected by the opinions and ideas of weak mortals, any more than the notions they form of him, can alter his essential attributes. In fine, if our teachers had not made it a duty to renounce common sense, and to close with notions that carry in their consequences the contradictory evidence of their premises, they would not refuse to avow that God would be the most unjust, the most unreasonable, the most cruel of tyrants, if he should punish beings, whom he himself created imperfect, and possessed of a deficiency of reason and common sense.

Let us reflect a little longer, and we shall find that the theologians have studied to make of the Divinity a ferocious master, unreasonable and changing, who exacts from his creatures qualities they have not, and services they cannot perform. The ideas they have formed of this unknown being, are almost always borrowed from those of men of power, who, jealous of their power and respect from their subjects, pretend that it is the duty of these last to have for them sentiments of submission, and punish with rigour those, who, by their conduct or their discourse, announce sentiments not sufficiently respectful to their superiors. Thus you see, Madam, that God has been fashioned by the clergy on the model of an uneasy despot, suspicious of his subjects, jealous of the opinions they may entertain of him, and who, to secure his power, cruelly chastises those who have not littleness of mind sufficient to flatter his vanity, nor courage enough to resist his power.

It is evident that it is on ideas so ridiculous, and so contrary to those which nature offers us of the Divinity, that the absurd system of the priests is founded, which they persuade themselves is very sensible and agreeable to the opinions of mankind; and which is very seriously insulted, they say, if men think differently; and which will punish with severity those who abandon themselves to the guidance of reason, the glory of man. Nothing can be more pernicious to the human kind than this fatal madness, which deranges all our ideas of a just God—of a God, good, wise, all-powerful, and whose glory and power, neither the devotion nor rebellion of his creatures can affect. In consequence of these impertinent suppositions of the priesthood, men have ever been afraid to form notions agreeable to the mysterious Sovereign of the universe, on whom they are dependent; their mind is put to the torture to divine his incomprehensible nature, and, in their fear of displeasing him, they have assigned to him human attributes, without per-

ceiving that when they pretend to honour him, they dishonour Deity, and that being compelled to bestow on him qualities that are incompatible with Deity, they actually annihilate from their mind the pure representation of Deity, as witnessed in all nature. It is thus, that in almost all the religions on the face of the earth, under the pretext of making known the Divinity, and explaining his views towards mortals, the priests have rendered him incomprehensible, and have actually promulgated, under the garb of religion, nothing save absurdities, by which, if we admit them, we shall destroy those notions which nature gives us of Deity.

When we reflect on the Divinity, do we not see that mankind have plunged farther and farther into darkness, as they assimilated him to themselves ; that their judgment is always disturbed when they would make their deity the object of their meditations ; that they cannot reason justly, because they never have any but obscure and absurd ideas ; that they are almost always in uncertainty, and never agree with themselves, because their principles are replete with doubt ; that they always tremble, because they imagine that it is very dangerous to be deceived ; that they dispute without ceasing, because that is impossible to be convinced of any thing, when they reason on objects of which they know nothing, and which the imaginations of men are forced to paint differently : in fine, that they cruelly torment one another about opinions equally uninteresting, though they attach to them the greatest importance, and because the vanity of the one party never allows it to subscribe to the reveries of the other.

It is thus that the divinity has become to us a source of evil, division, and quarrels ; it is thus that his name alone inspires terror ; it is thus that religion has become the signal of so many combats, and has always been the true apple of discord among unquiet mortals, who always dispute with the greatest heat, on subjects

of which they can never have any true ideas. They make it a duty to think and reason on his attributes ; and they can never arrive at any just conclusions, because their mind is never in a condition to form true notions of what strikes their senses. In the impossibility of knowing the Deity by themselves, they have recourse to the opinion of others whom they consider more adroit in theology, and who pretend to an intimate acquaintance with God, being inspired by him, and having secret intelligence of his purposes with regard to the human kind. Those privileged men teach nothing to the nations of the earth, except what their reveries have reduced to a system, without giving them ideas that are clear and definite. They paint God under characters the most agreeable to their own interests ; they make of him, a good monarch for those who blindly submit to their tenets, but terrible to those who refuse not to blindly follow them.

Thus you perceive, Madam, what those men are who have obviously made of the Deity an object so bizarre as they announce him, and who, to render their opinions the more sacred, have pretended that he is grievously offended, when we do not admit implicitly the ideas they promulgate of God. In the books of Moses, God defines himself, *I am, that I am* ; yet does this inspired writer detail the history of this God, as a tyrant who tempts men, and who punishes them for being tempted, who exterminated all the human kind by a deluge, except a few of one family, because one man had fallen ; in a word, who, in all his conduct behaves as a despot, whose power dispenses with all the rules of justice, reason, and goodness.

Have the successors of Moses transmitted to us ideas more clear, more sensible, more comprehensible of the divinity ? Has the Son of God made his Father perfectly known to us ? Has the church, perpetually boasting of the light she diffuses among men, become more fixed and certain, to do away our un-

certainty? Alas! In spite of all these supernatural succours, we know nothing in nature beyond the grave; the ideas which are communicated to us, the recitals of our infallible teachers, are calculated only to confound our judgment, and reduce our reason to silence. They make of God a pure spirit; that is to say, a being who has nothing in common with matter, and who, nevertheless, has created matter, which he has produced from his own fiat—his essence or substance. They have made him the mirror of the universe, and the soul of the universe. They have made him an infinite being, who fills all space by his immensity, although the material world occupies some part in space. They have made him a being all powerful, but whose projects are incessantly varying, who neither can nor will maintain man in good order, nor permit the freedom of action necessary for rational beings, and who is alternately pleased and displeased with the same beings, and their actions. They make him an infinite good father, but who avenges himself without measure. They make of him a monarch infinitely just, but who confounds the innocent with the guilty, who has mingled injustice and cruelty, in causing his own son to be put to death to expiate the crimes of the human kind; though they are incessantly sinning and repenting for pardon.

They make of him a being full of wisdom and foresight, yet insensible to the folly and short-sightedness of mortals. They make him a reasonable being who becomes angry at the thoughts of his creatures, though involuntary, and consequently necessary; thoughts which he himself puts into their heads; and who condemns them to eternal punishments if they believe not in reveries that are incompatible with the divine attributes, or who dare to doubt whether God can possess qualities that are not capable of being reconciled among themselves.

Is it then surprising that so many good people are shocked at the revolting ideas, so contradictory and

so appalling, which hurl mortals into a state of uncertainty and doubt as to the existence of the Deity, or even to force them into absolute denial of the same. It is impossible to admit in effect, the doctrine of the deity of priestcraft, in which we constantly see infinite perfections, allied with imperfections the most striking; in which, when we reflect but momentarily, we shall find that it cannot produce but disorder in the imagination, and leaves it wandering among errors that reduce it to despair, or some impostors, who, to subjugate mankind, have wished to throw them into embarrassment, confound their reason, and fill them with terror. Such appears in effect, to be the motives of those who have the arrogance to pretend to a secret knowledge, which they distribute among mankind, though they have no knowledge even of themselves. They always paint God under the traits of an inaccessible tyrant, who never shews himself but to his ministers and favourites, who please to veil him from the eyes of the vulgar; and who are violently irritated when they find any who oppose their pretensions, or when they refuse to believe the priests and their unintelligible farragoes.

If, as I have often said, it be impossible to believe what we cannot comprehend, or to be intimately convinced of that of which we can form no distinct and clear ideas, we may thence conclude that, when the Christians assure us they believe that God has announced himself in some secret and peculiar way to them that he has not done to other men, either they are themselves deceived, or they wish to deceive us. Their faith, or their belief in God, is merely an acceptance of what their priests have taught them of a Being whose existence they have rendered more than doubtful to those who would reason and meditate. The Deity cannot, assuredly, be the being whom the Christians admit on the word of their theologians. Is there, in good truth, a man in the world, who can form any idea of a spirit? If we ask the priests what

a spirit is? they will tell us, that a spirit is an immaterial being who has none of the passions of which men are the subjects. But what is an immaterial spirit? It is a being that has none of the qualities which we can fathom; that has neither form, nor extension, nor colour.

But how can we be assured of the existence of a being who has none of these qualities? It is by *faith*, say the the priests, that we must be assured of his existence. But what is this *faith*? It is to adhere, without examination, to what the priests tell us. But what is it the priests tell us of God? They tell us of things which we can neither comprehend nor reconcile among themselves. The existence, even of God, has, in their hands, become the most impenetrable mystery in religion. But do the priests themselves, comprehend this ineffable God, whom they announce to other men? Have they just ideas of him? Are they themselves sincerely convinced of the existence of a being who unites incompatible qualities which reciprocally exclude the one or the other? We cannot admit it; and we are authorised to conclude, that when the priests profess to believe in God, either they know not what they say, or they wish to deceive us.

Do not then be surprised, Madam, if you should find that there are, in fact, people who have ventured, to doubt, of the existence of the Deity of the theologians, because, on meditating on the descriptions given of him, they have discovered them to be incomprehensible, or replete with contradiction. Do not be astonished if they never listen, in reasoning, to any arguments that oppose themselves to common sense, and seek for the existence of the priest's deity; other proofs than have yet been offered mankind. His existence cannot be demonstrated in revelations, which we discover on examination, to be the work of imposture; revelations sap the foundations laid down for belief in a Divinity, which they would wish to establish. This existence cannot be founded on the

qualities which our priests have assigned to the Divinity, seeing, that in the association of these qualities, there only results a God whom we cannot comprehend, and by consequence of whom, we can form no certain ideas. This existence cannot be founded on the moral qualities which our priests attribute to the Divinity, seeing these are irreconcilable in the same subject, who cannot be at once good and evil, just and unjust, merciful and implacable, wise and the enemy of human reason.

On what then ought we to found the existence of God? The priests, themselves, tell us, that it is on reason, and the spectacle of nature, on the marvellous order which appears in the universe. Those to whom these motives for believing in the existence of the Divinity, do not appear convincing, find not, in any of the religions in the world, motives more persuasive; for all systems of theology, framed for the exercise of the imagination, plunge us into more uncertainty respecting their evidence, when they appeal to nature for proofs of what they advance.

What then are we to think of the God of the clergy? Can we think that he exists, without reasoning on that existence? And what shall we think of those who are ignorant of this God, or have no belief in his existence; who cannot discover him in the works of nature, either as good or evil; who behold only order and disorder succeeding alternately? What idea shall we form of those men who regard matter as eternal, as actuated on by laws peculiar to itself; as sufficiently powerful to produce itself under all the forms we behold; as perpetually exerting itself in nourishing and destroying itself, in combining and dissolving itself; as incapable of love or of hatred, as deprived of the faculties of *intelligence* and *sentiment* known to belong to beings of our species, but capable of supporting those beings whose organization has made them intelligent, sensible, and reasonable?

What shall we say of those free-thinkers who find

neither good nor evil, neither order nor disorder in the universe ; that all things are but relative to different conditions of beings, of which they have evidence ; and that all that happens in the universe is necessary, and subjected to destiny. In a word, what shall we think of these men ?

Shall we say that they have only a different manner of viewing things, or that they use different words in expressing themselves ? They call that *Nature* which others call the *Divinity* ; they call that *Necessity*, which others call the *Divine decrees* ; they call that the *Energy of Nature*, which others call the *Author of Nature* ; they call that *Destiny* or *Fate*, which others call *God*, whose laws are always going forward.

Have we then any right to hate and to exterminate them ? No, without doubt ; at least, we cannot admit that we have any reason that those should perish, who speak only the same language with ourselves, and who are reciprocally beneficial to us. Nevertheless, it is to this degree of extravagance that the baneful ideas of religion have carried the human mind. Harassed and set on by their priests, men have hated and assassinated each other, because that in religious matters they agree not to one creed. Vanity has made some imagine that they are better than others, more intelligible, although they see that theology is a language which they neither understand, nor which they themselves could invent. The very name of Freethinker, suffices to irritate them, and to arm the fury of others, who repeat, without ceasing, the name of God, without having any precise idea of the Deity. If, by chance, they imagine that they have any notions of him, they are only confused, contradictory, incompatible, and senseless notions, which have been inspired in their infancy by their priests, and those who, as we have seen, have painted God in all those traits which their imagination furnished, or those who appear more conformed to their passions and interests, than to the well-being of their fellow-creatures.

The least reflection will, nevertheless, suffice to make any one perceive, that God, if he is just and good, cannot exist as a being known to some, but unknown to others. If Freethinkers are men void of reason, God would be unjust to punish them for being blind and insensible, or for having too little penetration and understanding to perceive the force of those natural proofs on which the existence of the Deity has been founded. A God full of equity cannot punish men for having been blind or devoid of reason. The Freethinkers, as foolish as they are supposed, are beings less insensible than those who make professions of believing in a God full of qualities that destroy one another; they are less dangerous than the adorers of a changeable Deity, who, they imagine, is pleased with the extermination of a large portion of mankind, on account of their opinions. Our speculations are indifferent to God, whose glory man cannot tarnish—whose power mortals cannot abridge. They may, however, be advantageous to ourselves; they may be perfectly indifferent to society, whose happiness they may not affect; or they may be the reverse of all this. For it is evident that the opinions of men do not influence the happiness of society.

Hence, Madam, let us leave men to think as they please, provided that they act in such a manner as promotes the general good of society. The thoughts of men injure not others; their actions may—their reveries never. Our ideas, our thoughts, our systems, depend not on us. He who is fully convinced on one point, is not satisfied on another. All men have not the same eyes, nor the same brains; all have not the same ideas, the same education, or the same opinions; they never agree wholly, when they have the temerity to reason on matters that are enveloped in the obscurity of imaginative fiction, and which cannot be subject to the usual evidence accompanying matters of report, or historic relation.

Men do not long dispute on objects that are cogni-

zable to their senses, and which they can submit to the test of experience. The number of self-evident truths on which men agree is very small. And the fundamentals of morality are among this number. It is obvious to all men of sense, that beings, united in society, require to be regulated by justice, that they ought to respect the happiness of each other, that mutual succour is indispensable ; in a word, that they are obliged to practice virtue, and to be useful to society, for personal happiness. It is evident to demonstration, that the interest of our preservation excites us to moderate our desires, and put a bridle on our passions ; to renounce dangerous habits, and to abstain from vices which can only injure our fortune, and undermine our health. These truths are evident to every being whose passions have not dominion over his reason : they are totally independent of theological speculations, which have neither evidence nor demonstration, and which our mind can never verify ; they have nothing in common with the religious opinions, on which the imagination soars from earth to sky, nor with the fanaticism and credulity, which are so frequently producing among mankind the most opposite principles to morality and the well-being of society.

They who are of the Freethinkers' opinions, are not more dangerous than they who are of the priests' opinions. In short, Christianity has produced effects more appalling than heathenism. The speculative principles of the Freethinkers, have done no injury to society ; the contagious principles of fanaticism and enthusiasm, have only served to spread disorder on the earth.

If there are dangerous notions and fatal speculations in the world, they are those of the devotees, who obey a religion that divides men, and excites their passions, and who sacrifice the interests of society, of sovereigns, and their subjects to their own ambition, their avarice, their vengeance and fury.

There is no question that the Freethinker has mo-

tives to be good, even though he admit not notions that bridle his passions. It is true that the Freethinker has no invisible motives, but he has motives, and a visible restraint, which, if he reflects, cannot fail to regulate his actions. If he doubts about religion, he does not question the laws of moral obligation; nor that it is his duty to moderate his passions, to labour for his happiness, and that of others, to avoid hatred, disdain, and discord as crimes; and that he should shun vices which may injure his constitution, reputation, and fortune.

Thus relatively to his morality, the Freethinker has principles more sure than those of superstition and fanaticism. In fine, if nothing can restrain the Freethinker, a thousand forces united, would not prevent the fanatic from the commission of crimes, and the violation of duties the most sacred.

Besides, I believe that I have already proved that the morality of superstition has no certain principles; that it varies with the interests of the priests, who explain the intentions of the Divinity, as they find these accordant or discordant to their views and interests; which, alas! are too often the result of cruel and wicked purposes. On the contrary, the Freethinker, who has no morality but what he draws from the nature and character of man, and the constant events which transpire in society, has a certain morality that is not founded either on the caprice of circumstances, or the prejudices of mankind; a morality that tells him when he does evil, and blames him for the evil so done, and that is superior to the morality of the intolerant fanatic and persecutor.

You thus perceive, Madam, on which side the morality of the Freethinkers leans, what advantages it possesses over that inculcated on the superstitious devotee, who knows no other rule than the caprice of his priest, nor any other morality than what suits the interest of the clergy, nor any other virtues than such

as make him the slave of their will, and which are too often in opposition to the great interests of mankind. Thus you perceive that what is understood by the natural morality of the Freethinker, is much more constant, and more sure than that of the superstitious, who believe they can render themselves agreeable to God by the intercession of priests. If the Freethinker is blind or corrupted, by not knowing his duties which nature prescribes to him, it is precisely in the same way as the superstitious, whose invisible motives and sacred guides prevent him not from going occasionally astray.

These reflections will serve to confirm what I have already said, to prove that morality has nothing in common with religion; and that religion is its own enemy, though it pretends to dispense with support from other sources. True morality is founded on the nature of man; the morality of religion is founded only on the chimeras of imagination, and on the caprice of those who speak of the Deity in a language too often contrary to nature and right reason.

Allow me then, Madam, to repeat to you, that morality is the only natural religion for man; the only object worthy his notice on earth, the only worship which he is required to render to the Deity. It is uniform and replete with obvious duties which rest not on the dictation of priests, blabbing chit-chat they do not understand. If it be this morality which I have defined, that makes us what we are, ought we not to labour strenuously for the happiness of our race? If it be this morality that makes us reasonable, that enables us to distinguish good from evil, the useful from the hurtful; that makes us sociable, and enables us to live in society to receive and repay mutual benefits; we ought at least to respect all those who are its friends.

If it be this morality which sets bounds to our temper, it is that which interdicts the commission in

thought, word, or action, of what would injure another, or disturb the happiness of society. If it attach us to the preservation of all that is dear to us, it points out how by a certain line of conduct we may preserve ourselves; for its laws, clear and of easy practice, inflict on those who disobey them instant punishment, fear and remorse; on the other hand, the observance of its duties is accompanied with immediate and real advantages, and notwithstanding the depravity which prevails on earth, vice always finds itself punished, and virtue is not always deprived of the satisfaction it yields, of the esteem of men, and the recompence of society; even if men are in other respects unjust, they will concede to the virtuous the due meed of praise.

Behold, Madam, to what the dogmas of natural religion reduce us: in meditating on it, and in practising its duties, we shall be truly religious, and filled with the spirit of the Divinity; we shall be admired and respected by men, we shall be in the right way to be loved by those who rule over us, and respected by those who serve us; we shall be truly happy in this world, and we shall have nothing to fear in the next.

These are laws so clear, so demonstrable, and whose infraction is so evidently punished; whose observance is so surely recompensed, that they constitute the code of nature of all living beings, sentiment and reasoning, all acknowledge their authority; all find in them the evidence of Deity, and consider those as sceptics who doubt their efficacy. The Freethinker does not refuse to acknowledge as fundamental laws, those which are obviously founded on the God of Nature, and on the immutable and necessary circumstances of things cognizable to the faculties of sentient natures. The Indian, the Chinese, the savage, perceives these self-evident laws, whenever he is not carried headlong by his passions into crime and error.

In fine, these laws, so true, and so evident, never can appear uncertain, obscure, or false, as are those superstitious chimeras of the imagination which knaves have substituted for the truths of nature, and the dicta of common sense; and those devotees who know no other laws than those of the caprices of their priests, necessarily obey a morality little calculated to produce personal or general happiness, but much calculated to lead to extravagance and inconvenient practices.

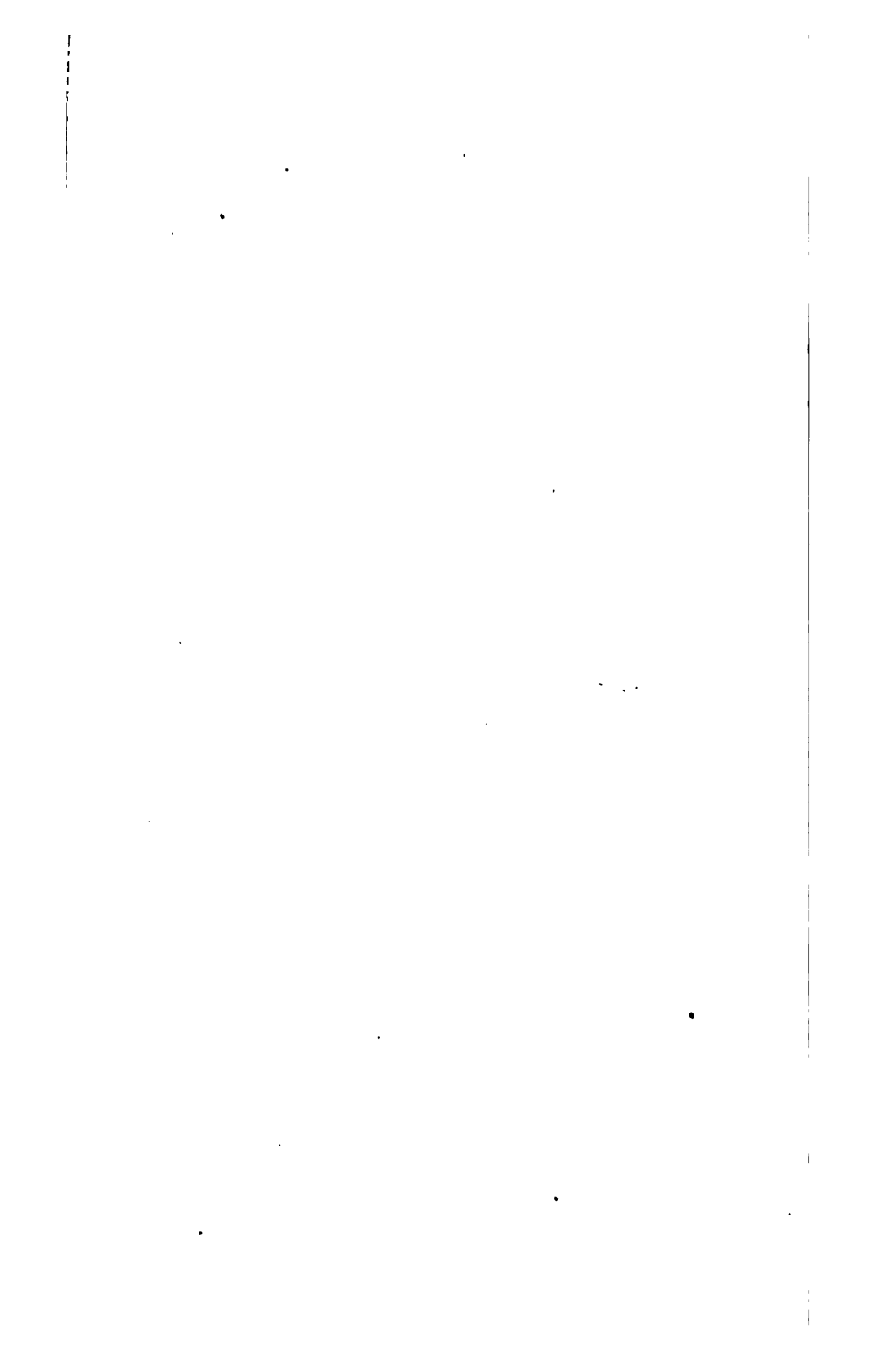
Hence, charming Eugenia, you will allow mankind to think as they please, and judge of them after their actions. Oppose reason to their systems, when they are pernicious to themselves or others; remove their prejudices if you can, that they may not become the victims of their caprices, shew them the truth which may always remove error; banish from their minds the fancies which disturb them; advise them not to meditate on the mysteries of their priests; bid them renounce all those illusions they have substituted for morality; and advise them to turn their thoughts on that which conduces to their happiness. Meditate yourself on your own nature, and the duties which it imposes on you. Fear those chastisements which follow inattention to this law. Be ambitious to be approved by your own understanding, and you will rarely fail to receive the applauses of the human kind, as a good member of society.

If you wish to meditate, think with the greatest strength of your mind on your nature. Never abandon the torch of reason; cherish truth sincerely. When you are in uncertainty, pause, or follow what appears the most probable, always abandoning opinions that are destitute of foundation, or evidence of their truth and benefit to society. Then will you, in good truth, yield to the impulse of your heart when reason is your guide; then will you consult in the calmness of passion, and counsel yourself on the advantages of virtue, and the consequences of its want;

and you may flatter yourself that you cannot be displeasing to a wise God, though you disbelieve absurdities, nor agreeable to a good God in doing things hurtful to yourself or to others.

I am, Madam, &c.

THE END.



THE
LIFE OF DAVID;

OR, THE
HISTORY

OF THE
Man after God's own Heart.

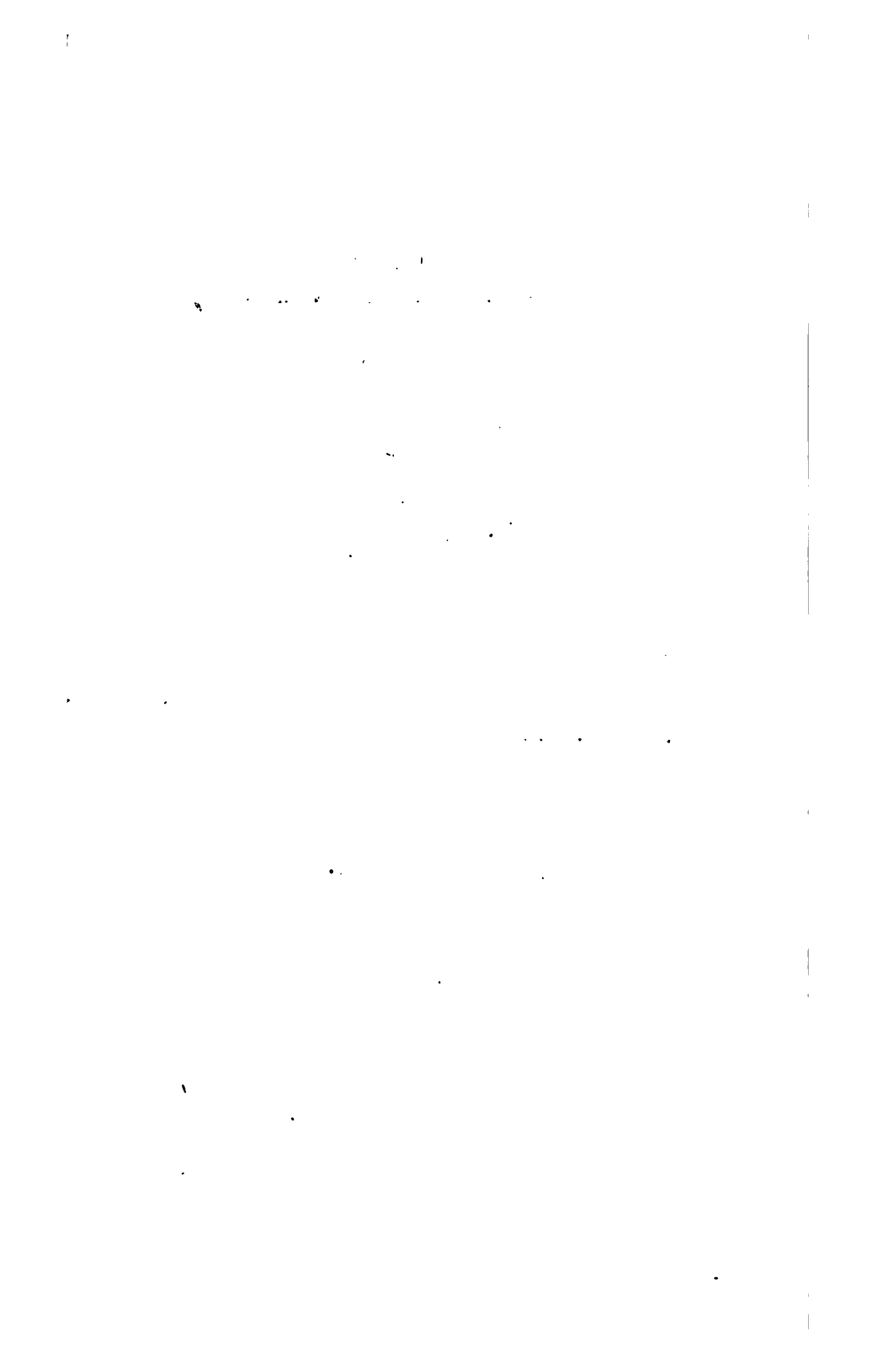
Omnia probate, bonum tenete.—S.P.

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1820.



TO THE

REV. SAM. CHANDLER,

D.D. F.R. and A. SS.

To whom, Sir, could the republication of this little history with more propriety be addressed, than to a gentleman to whom it is under such considerable obligations? When it first appeared, it was honoured with *your* notice in an especial manner; and is not a little benefited by your *labours*. You, Sir, with a *careful* hand noted its errors; and what has stood the test of your strictures is certainly established with additional authority. Whatever might be the motives which influenced *so vigorous* an exertion of your *learned* and *critical* powers—powers so universally acknowledged and respected, the author of this piece will not now inquire: it is sufficient to him, that they operated to the extending the knowledge of his tract, among that class of readers who stood most in need of the information it furnished; and he is persuaded you will with pleasure hear his assurances, that the work owes no small share of what approbation it may have gained, to your *elaborate review* of it. Several worthy pious persons having candidly declared in private conversa-

tion, (and unknowingly to the author himself) that the perusal of your book really strengthened the facts advanced in the history. For this, therefore, he considers you as entitled to his thanks ; and that his acknowledgments might be as public as the obligation, no method of conveyance seemed more proper, than to prefix them to this new Edition of “ *The History of the Man after God’s own Heart.*”

He scorns, Sir, to follow the practice of Dedicators in common, who, from venal motives, surfeit their patrons with fulsome adulation : he will not, therefore, call the blushes into your countenance, by expressing his private sentiments of your *learned* Review of this Historical Sketch, farther than by one observation ; which is, that had you been totally unknown in the republic of letters before, your apology for the death of Uriah would alone have raised your literary fame beyond the power of envious detraction. However, not to offend your modesty, he desists from farther encomiums ; but with a wish that you may long live to enjoy the reputation acquired by so *laudable* a performance, he concludes with subscribing himself,

Sir, your greatly obliged,
and very humble Admirer.

P R E F A C E.

SOME reverend panegyrists* on our late king,† have, a little unfortunately, been fond of comparing him with a monarch in no respect resembling him; except in the length of his reign, *thirty and three years*: which a lucky text informed them to be the duration of David's sovereignty over the Hebrew nation. Had our good old king died a year sooner, or had we been indulged with him a year longer, the opportunity of applying this text would then have been lost; and in either case we might not have heard of the parallel.

A reverence for the memory of a worthy Prince, has occasioned the world's being troubled with a new history of king David, (which, otherwise might not have appeared) merely to shew how the memory of the British monarch is affected by the comparison.

“Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?” is the language of Jesus Christ. “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good;” is the language of the apostle Paul. The liberty thus granted is unlimited; but it is more than mere grant of liberty, these are positive injunctions: let no one then be so timid as to resign an inclination to satisfy just doubts: in Britain, thanks to the obstinate heresy of our brave forefathers, no audacious Romish priest dare prescribe limits to the exercise of our reasoning faculties; and Protestant ones surely will not: nay, they cannot,

* Dr. Chandler, Mr. Palmer and others.

† George the 11d.

consistently with those principles which justify their dissent from the Romish communion. An honest desire to obtain truth, will sanctify the most rigid scrutiny into every thing. An apostle has told us, that we are not to believe even an angel from Heaven, who should preach any other gospel than that of Christ;* and, no authority can be so sacred, as to set aside the *most valuable distinction of humanity*, with which our Creator has furnished us; or to give the lie to our most self-evident conceptions of right and wrong.

If that liberty, of which Britons boast the possession, means any thing, it must primarily include freedom of thought; without which there can be no freedom of action. Thus it must mean an uncontrolled power to examine the validity of every proposition offered to our assent; without which power, and the due exercise of it, our assent cannot be the assent of rational beings. If the reformed religion means any thing, it must mean a religion founded by the authority, not of councils and synods, but of conviction, the result of private judgment. True Protestants do not puzzle themselves about the decisions of Trent, Constance, or Dort; they protest against all authoritative dictates; disciples of the meek, the lowly, the humane Jesus, they seek of themselves to judge of right or wrong. Who is most the Protestant, the friend to human kind, and to truth? Those who appeal to the human understanding, and submit to the public judgment whether things are really so or not; or those who say, they are so, they shall be so, you shall acknowledge them to be so, or else——?

* Galatians i. 8.

Let not weak-minded Christians who think truth not able to maintain its authority without legal enforcements, lament what they call licentious abuses of that liberty on which we are happy to congratulate ourselves: injudicious productions of the pen will always meet the treatment they deserve. Fallacious pretensions to reasoning cannot deceive mankind in these liberal times; nor can truth be obscured, when the attention of honest inquiries after it, is properly exerted. If the little historical sketch which follows, and which in fact, exhibits no more than what we have all daily read, without presuming to decide upon; if it really is that audacious calumny which many roundly affirm it to be; it will doubtless be considered as such: if, on the contrary, it contains undeniable matters of fact, fallaciousness will appear in the angry objections against it; and the writer trusts, the futility of such objections, have already been made sufficiently apparent.

The name of David has never been mentioned by divines but with the greatest respect, from the time in which he lived to the present day; and he is always quoted as an illustrious example of holiness! so illustrious, that the greatest instance of purity that ever existed on earth, was frequently saluted by way of eminence, in reference to him, *Son of David!* so illustrious, that on the death of the late king of Great Britain, many sermons were preached and published, in which, parallels are drawn betwixt him and this standard of piety, in order to justify encomiums on the former, by declaring how nearly he resembled the latter.

In what manner David first acquired, and has ever

since maintained, this extraordinary reputation, is not difficult to deduce, he was advanced, by an enraged prophet, from obscurity to the Hebrew throne; and taught by the fate of the unhappy monarch who was raised in the same manner, whom he supplanted, and whose family he crushed, he prudently attached himself to the cause of his patrons,* and they were the trumpeters of his fame. The same order of men, true to their common cause, have continued to sound the praise of this church-hero from generation to generation, unto the present time: in like manner the grand violator of the English constitution obtained the epithet of *holy Martyr*.

A new scrutiny being made, however, into David's claim to sanctity, which, notwithstanding a very learned defence of him, turned out so greatly to his dishonour; the scene has been shifted by a few whose sense has overbalanced their bigotry by two or three scruples. Some such, like Sheba of old, blow the trumpet and cry, "We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse!" In this manner have some clerical weather-cocks veered about to an opposite point of the compass; and David, who, till now has been considered as a man who "did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite," has, by one stroke of politics, been resigned to the mercy of his detectors; and the importance of the detection endeavoured to be annihilated, as the easier task; all which appears with rather an ill grace, at a time when it is manifestly extorted.

* The Prophets and Priests.

Thus much being premised relating to the conduct of the champions for orthodoxy, on the occasion of this little squib which has produced so much bustle in the clerical hives, proceed we to say something of the tract itself.

The intention was, without any regard to remote objects, or heed of future consequences, which in fact ought *never* to be considered in investigating any point; to give a fair undisguised narrative of the life and transactions of David, king of Israel.

This, however, was not so easy to perform, as it was to project; from three difficulties which impeded the execution.

1. It is not easy to conquer the early prejudices of education in favour of the Hebrew nation; which the careful inculcation of their story during our infancy, hinders our seeing in a proper light: so that relations which might shock humanity in what is called prophane history, are read without any emotion but that of reverence, in *this*. This misconception is in great measure assisted.

2. By their History being written *by themselves*: and difficult to be corrected.

3. By the broken unconnected manner in which it is transmitted down to us: which renders it impossible to give a complete narrative of any period in it.

A common share of humanity, which a little attention to common sense enabled the author to extend to every nation under Heaven as the objects of it, relieved him from the first of these difficulties: to overcome the other two, he has assumed the liberty of giving *his* sense to what appears dark, or misrepresented; which he hopes will not be denied him, so

long as it is not found that a forced construction is put upon any thing cited ; or, that it is represented in any other light than what it naturally appears in, when considered with the freedom, which it is our duty to use in the examination of every historical record.

And lest it should be imagined that too great liberties are taken with the biblical writers ; it may not be amiss to mention once for all, that innumerable instances might be produced, to shew that the authority of *the Lord*, so continually quoted to sanctify every transaction related ; constituted for the most part, nothing more than national phrases, which obtained universally among so bigotted a people as on all occasions the Jews appear to have been : one-twelfth part of whom were appropriated to the priesthood ! A phraseology in some measure similar obtained in England, at that time, when shunning the cruel talons of papacy, the people rushed into the jaws of wild enthusiasm. That the sense in which the acts of David are here understood, is the most obvious and natural, appears from the amazing pains it has occasioned his champions, to force another upon them. Of this, the *Life of David*, by Dr. Delany, is a most remarkable instance ; but the gross palliations, puerile conjectures, and mean shifts to which he has been driven, prove the difficulty of the task ; while they are too frivolous to bias any, but the most *Catholic believers*.

Mr. Stackhouse, in his *History of the Bible*, has urged arguments against particular passages, under the title of *Objections* ; so cogent, that *his answers* to them, certainly could not be satisfactory even to himself.

Dr. Chandler has lately added his name to the list

of David's apologists. Strange! that so holy a king should need the exertion of so much learned and critical dexterity, to establish his fame for goodness of heart! This gentleman's performance, which was published as a reply to the first edition of the present work, is a very extraordinary piece; and shews that great learning is no security for soundness of judgment. The Doctor's book has been considered in a letter addressed to him, and published separately; to which the reader is referred for an examination into the merits of his arguments. In answering the Doctor, new lights opened on many occurrences, which, as far as they could be detached from that particular controversy, are taken into the present edition.

THE best of kings is a title which adulation and servility have always conferred on the most contemptible, as well as the most detestable tyrants; and the frequency of its application to the object is ever in proportion as he is undeserving of it. Had the flattering sycophants of king David been satisfied with applying to him this common-place appellation, rational men, who form their conclusions from the result of general experience, would have inferred only that he had been one of the numerous herd of bad princes who have oppressed mankind, and there would have been nothing peculiar either in the fact or the inference. But when the extremity of adulation conferred on David the title of *The Man after God's own heart*, thinking men, who know the source from which such adulation ever flows, are prepared to expect, in the develop-

ment of his history, a character pre-eminently wicked, and in this they are not deceived.

All historians of credit agree in describing *God's chosen people*, the *Jews*, as the most vicious and detestable of mankind;* their own historians confirm this character of them, and the whole series of facts which constitute their history, prove it beyond a possibility of doubt.

Among *the chosen people of God*—the most depraved of all nations—it is pretty certain that the worst and wickedest man of that nation was David, *The Man after God's own heart*. The truth of this proposition will be abundantly proved in the following short history.

A question will here naturally present itself, how the Jews became so much more vicious and depraved than their neighbours? And to resolve that question, it will be necessary to consider in what respects their laws and customs differed from those of others. It will be found that they differed most essentially from all other nations in the world in two particulars: 1st. They had more religion than any other nation; and, 2dly. They had more priests. Other nations among whom superstitious rites and ceremonies prevailed, were satisfied with practising them on solemn festivals,

* Tacitus describes the Jewish people as formed of the worst outcasts of the surrounding nations, collected together by Moses, and kept for ever separated from the rest of mankind, by an opposition of manners, and hostility of sentiment. *Nam passim quisque, spretis religionibus patriis, tributa et stipes illuc congregabant; unde auctæ Judeorum res—adversus omnes alios hostile odium—transgressi in morem eorum, idem usurpant; nec quidquam prius imbuuntur quam contemnere Deos, exuere patriam; parentes, liberos, fratres, vilia habere.*—Taciti Hist. Lib. v.

and occasionally on particular or important events ; but the Jews practised their superstition incessantly : none of the common duties, or ordinary functions of life, could be performed by them, without a reference to the rules of their superstition ; they were bound to a strict observance of them whenever they ate, drank, or performed any other of the natural functions.*

Other nations had a few priests dedicated to their gods or idols, seldom exceeding a few dozen in a whole nation ;† but the Jewish priesthood constituted

* *Moses quo sibi in posterum gentem firmaret, novos ritus contrariosque ceteris mortalibus indidit ; profana illic omnia, quæ apud nos sacra ; rursum concessa apud illos, quæ nobis incesta.—Seperati epulis, discreti cubilibus, projectissima ad libidinem gens, alienarum cubitu abstinent, inter se nihil illicitum, circumcidere genitalia instituere, ut diversitate noscantur.—Taciti Hist. Lib. v.* It is impossible to draw a more disgusting picture of a nation, than this elegant and correct historian, in describing the Jews.

† The Romans, though so numerous and powerful a nation, had but very few priests, compared to the Jews. The Augurs were at first only 3, and in process of time were increased to 15. The Aruspices were 12. The Pontifices were at first but 4, and were afterwards increased to 16. The Flamines were but 3. The Salii 12. The Feciales, who were 20 in number, though classed by authors among the priesthood, were merely civil officers employed as heralds. And the Vestals, or Nuns of Rome, were only 4 ; altogether between 50 and 60. Vide Kennett's *Roman Antiq.* And yet Saint Austin, *De Civitate Dei*, Lib. iv. cap. 15, admits that the Romans were so virtuous, that God gave them the empire of the world because they were more virtuous than other nations, yet, with true Christian charity, he says, that they must nevertheless be damned as heathens. We do not find that the priests of other enlightened nations of antiquity were proportionably much more numerous than among the Romans. In England at present the number of the priesthood cannot be much less than 20,000 ; there are near 10,000 parishes, each having one priest at least, several two, and some three or more, exclusive of Deans and Chapters,

a twelfth part of the whole people, and claimed and exercised the privilege of devouring a tenth part of the produce of the country, without contributing any thing to its productive labour.* And it is probable that the Jewish nation alone, though but a miserable handful of semi-barbarous savages, had more priests than the rest of the then known world collectively, and were consequently more vicious and more enslaved than any other people.

Mankind have been too long duped by that universal *cant* of priests, who, in their language, have ever affected to couple *religion* and *morality* together, and to represent them as *inseparably united*, though the slightest attention must show that they are perfectly *distinct*, and a full and mature consideration of the subject must prove that they are even extremely *opposite*. They well knew that man, in the most abject state of mental degradation to which superstition could reduce him, must still acknowledge the force and excellence of virtue and morality, and must perceive

Prebends, &c. &c. and all these in the established church, as it is called, exclusive of a great variety of other sectaries of different denominations.

* The Jewish priesthood being one tribe, or twelfth part of the nation, do not appear to have assumed to themselves much more than an equal proportion, compared to their numbers, in taking the tithe or tenth part of the produce of the land, however unjust it may appear that they should be supported in idleness at the expence of the industry of the rest: but the English priesthood, though abundantly numerous, do not form above one five-hundredth part of the whole nation, yet they have the conscience to take also the tenth of the whole produce, which is near fifty times more than their just share, according to the proportion of their Jewish models, from whose example they pretend to derive their claim.

their necessary tendency to promote his welfare and happiness. They well knew how useful to their own views and interests it would be to persuade him that religion, virtue, and morality, were one and the same, or, at least, intimately and inseparably connected; the credulity of man gave credit to the imposture without examination, and the uniform experience of above 2,000 years has not hitherto been sufficient to undeceive him. Unhappy man! destined for ever to be the dupe of his own credulity, in opposition to the testimony of his experience, and the evidence of his senses. Does not the history of all ages show, that the most religious nations have always been, and still are, the most vicious and immoral!

Another most formidable evil necessarily results from such a system of superstition, that is, a state of civil slavery, which is always found its universal concomitant. Whenever the human mind is debased and degraded by a system of gross superstition, it becomes incapable of any one manly, liberal, or independent sentiment; every energy of the mind is lost, reason is surrendered, virtue, the chief support, if not the sole foundation of freedom, is banished, and man is fitted to receive the abject yoke of slavery; tyranny and despotism make an easy conquest of him, and the priest is ever ready to rivet his chains, and perpetuate his bondage, by the pretended sanction of Heaven. The power and influence of the priest and the tyrant is ever in proportion to the debasement of man; they have a common interest, have ever made a common cause against him, and have constantly erected their common throne on the ruins of his freedom, his welfare, and his happiness.

Let us not, therefore, be deterred from unmasking to the view of mankind that immense mass of vice and depravity which constitute the foundation of the Jewish superstition ; let no blind veneration for that hideous idol deter us from exposing its deformity ; let us cultivate that which is truly good and useful ; let reason assume her just empire over the mind of man, and credulity, ignorance, and folly, abdicate their usurped dominion : then shall we soon behold the galling fetters of vice and superstition broken by the irresistible power of virtue, morality, and truth.

THE
LIFE OF DAVID.

THE first establishment of régál government among the Hebrews, was occasioned by the corrupt administration of Joel and Abiah, the two sons of Samuel, whom he had deputed to judge Israel in the decline of his life.* The people, exasperated at the oppression they laboured under, applied to Samuel for redress, testifying a desire to experience a different mode of government, by peremptorily demanding a king.† At this, however, Samuel was greatly displeased: not that his sons had tyrannized over the people, for of that he takes no manner of notice, neither exculpating them, nor promising the people redress; his chagrin arose from this violent resumption of the supreme magistracy out of the hands of his family; a circumstance for which he expresses great resentment.‡ He consults the Lord, and not knowing else how the insurrection might terminate, in his name yields to their desires; promising them a king with vengeance to them.§ “For,” says the Lord, “they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.”¶ The people, nevertheless, resolving to free themselves from present oppression, at the hazard of the threatened judgments, obstinately persisted in their demand, and dispersed not without a promise of compliance.

Samuel, to all outward appearance, chose the most impartial method of choosing a king, which was by lot,

* 1 Sam. viii. 3. † Ver. 5. ‡ Ver. 6, &c. § Ver. 11, &c.,
¶ Ver 7. compared with chap. ix. 16. chap. x. 1.

from among the people assembled by tribes ; but prudently pitches upon his man, previous to the election ; the whole tenor of his conduct manifesting, that he intended to give them a king in name ; but still to retain the supreme authority in his own hands, by choosing one who should continue subordinate to his dictates. Opportunely for his purpose, a young countryman, named Saul, having rambled about to seek his father's asses, which had strayed, and finding all search after them vain, applied to Samuel as a prophet,* with a fee in his hand, to gain intelligence of his beasts.

We gather from several passages in Jewish history, that there were seminaries of prophets, *i. e.* the universities of the times, where youth were trained up to the mystery of prophesying. We find there were false prophets, nonconformists, not of the establishment ; we find that even the true ones were liable to be imposed on by their brethren ;† and we find moreover, by this instance, that prophets did not disdain to give assistance in their prophetic character, concerning domestic matters, for reasonable gratuities. A chief among the prophets, one who had been a judge over Israel, is applied to in a pecuniary way, for intelligence concerning lost cattle.‡

* 1 Sam. ix. 7, 8. † 1 Kings, xiii. 18. Josephus in loco.

‡ Pretensions to divinations continue to this day, though, in the opinion of reformed churches, all prophesying and miracles have long since ceased. These modern prophets are drolly ridiculed by our facetious countryman, Butler, in the person of Sydrophele, a dealer

——— “ In Destiny's dark counsels,
Who sage opinions of the moon sells ;
To whom all people, far and near,
On deep importances repair.
When brass or pewter hap to stray,
Or linen slinks out of the way ;
When geese and pullets are seduc'd,
And sows of sucking pigs are chous'd :
When cattle feel indisposition,
And need th' opinion of physician ;
When murrain reigns in hogs or sheep,
And chickens languish of the pip ;

It has been said, that this is the only instance recorded of a prophet being applied to for purposes of this nature ; but it appears that it was usual for men to have recourse to prophets, and that the phrase was, "Come, and let us go to the seer ;"* and that prophetic intelligence was paid for, is evident from the inquiry between Saul and his servant, concerning their ability to gratify him.†

But, to proceed : Saul not only found his asses, but a kingdom into the bargain ; and had the spirit of the Lord given to him;‡ which we find taken away§ again, when he proved untractable : though it seems somewhat odd, how he could possibly prove disobedient, while he acted under the influence of this Divine Spirit ! For, the possibility being admitted, the advantage of inspiration is difficult to be conceived.

After Samuel had in private || anointed Saul king, and told him his asses were already found, he dismissed him for the present. He then assembled the people for the election of a king : at which assembly, behold, the lot fell on the tribe of Benjamin ; and in that, on the family of Matri ; and finally, on Saul, the son of Kish.¶ An election somewhat resembling consistories for the appointment of bishops ; where the person being previously fixed on, God is solemnly prayed to for a direction of their choice.

It is not intended here to give a detail of the reign of king Saul ; the notice hitherto taken of him being merely because the life of David could not be properly introduced without mentioning the alteration of government, and the manner in which monarchy was es-

When yeast and outward means do fail,
And have no power to work on ale ;
When butter does refuse to come,
And love proves cross and humoursome ;
To him with questions and with urine,
They for discov'ry flock, or curing.

* 1 Sam. ix. 9. † Ver. 7, 8. ‡ Ch. x. 6. § Ch. xvi. 18.
|| Ch. x. 1. ¶ Ch. x. 20, 21.

established in Israel: since Samuel's disappointment in Saul, naturally leads to his similar choice of David.

The disobedience of Saul, in daring to sacrifice without his patron the prophet,* who failed of coming according to his appointment; and his lenity and prudence, in sparing the king, and some cattle, from a nation which Samuel, in the name of the Lord, had commanded him utterly to extirpate,† irreversibly lost him the favour of this imperious inexorable prophet: and, in the end, produced the miserable destruction not only of himself, but of his family: which will occasion no surprize, when we consider the absolute dominion and ascendancy which the Jewish priests maintained over this ignorant superstitious people. A dominion which every article in the Levitical law enlarged and strengthened.

We are not to imagine that the sparing Agag, king of the Amalekites, was the only cause of this rupture between him and Samuel. For we may gather from other parts of his history, that Saul was not over-well affected towards his patrons the Levites;‡ in subjection to whom he had too much spirit to continue. Samuel quickly perceived he had mistaken his man, he haughtily avowed his intention of deposing him;§ and ordering Agag to be brought into his presence, he hewed him in pieces—"before the Lord."||

We now come to the hero of the history.

In pursuance of his intention to make another king, Samuel went under the pretence of a sacrifice, and anointed another country youth,¶ which was David, the youngest son of Jesse, the Bethlehemite; and gave him the spirit of the Lord, which he had just taken from poor Saul. The king, in the mean time, reflecting on the precariousness of his situation, now that the priests, on the part of Samuel, were incensed against him; and well knowing their influence among his sub-

* 1 Sam. xiii. 8—14.

† Ch. xv. 3.

‡ Ch. 22, 18, 19. and

Ch. xxviii. 9.

§ Ch. xiii. 14. xv. 26, 28.

|| Ver. 33.

¶ Ch. xvi. 13.

jects, fell into a melancholy disorder of mind,* which his physicians were unable to remove.†

This was artfully made the occasion of introducing David to court. The king was advised to divert himself with music; and David was contrived to be recommended to him for his skill on the harp.‡ Saul accordingly sent to Jesse, to request his son; which was immediately complied with: and David was detained at court, in the capacity of the king's armour-bearer.§

Here the story begins to grow confused, beyond *luy-skill* to reconcile. A war with the Philistines is abruptly introduced; in the midst of the relation of which, we are abruptly informed that David returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep|| again; from whence his father sent him with provisions for his brothers, who were in the army.¶ What can be thought of this? Jesse hardly recalled his son from the honourable post of armour-bearer to the king; it is not likely that he was turned off, since we afterwards find him playing on the harp to the king, as before; ** neither was it proper employment for the king's armour-bearer to be feeding sheep, when the army was in the field, and his majesty with them in person! Why—the most easy method is to take it as we find it; to suppose it to be right, and go quietly on with the story.

In the Philistine army was a man of extraordinary size, named Goliath, who came out of their camp, day by day, challenging and defying any one among the Hebrews to single combat, and to rest the decision of their quarrel upon the event; an offer which no one among the Israelites was hitherto found hardy enough to accept.†† David is said to have arrived at the army just as it was forming for engagement; at which time the giant advanced as before, with reproachful menaces; and, after having enquired carefully concerning what reward would be given to the conqueror of this giant,

* 1 Sam. xvi. 14. † Josephus. ‡ 1 Sam. xvi. 18. § Ver. 21. || Ch. xvii. 15. ¶ Ch. xvii. 17. ** Ch. xviii. 10. †† Ch. xvii. 4. &c.

and learning that great riches and the king's daughter were to be the prizes of conquest, David courageously declared before Saul his acceptance of the challenge,* notwithstanding the contempt with which his offer had been treated.

Saul, relying on the youth's ardour and assurance of victory, girded his own armour on him:† but David put it off again, trusting entirely to a pouch of stones, and his own skill in slinging.‡ The success answered his hopes, and stamped, what would otherwise have been deemed a rash undertaking, with a more respectable name; he knocked Goliath down with a stone; then ran in upon him, cut his head off with his own sword, and brought it triumphantly to the king of Israel.§ The consequence was the defeat of the Philistines.

Here we meet with another stumbling-block. For, though Saul, as has already been observed, had sent to Jesse expressly for his son David; though David had played to him on the harp; though Saul had again sent to Jesse, to desire that David might be permitted to stay with him; and in consequence of this had given him a military appointment about his person; though he had now a fresh conference with him; had just¶ his own suit of armour on him; and though all these occurrences must have happened within a small space of time, yet his memory is made so to fail him on a sudden, that he knew nothing either of David, or his parentage! but while David went to meet the giant, he enquired of others, who proved as ignorant as himself, whose son|| the stripling was? This stumbling-block must likewise be stepped over, for it is not removeable.

The reputation which this gallant action procured to David, soon gained him advancement in the army, and a warm friendship with Saul's son, Jonathan.¶¶ But the inordinate acclamations of the people, on account

* 1 Sam. xvii. 32. † Ver. 38. ‡ Ver. 40. § Ver. 49. || Ver. 55.

¶¶ Ch. xviii. 3.

of the death of the Philistine giant, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands ;"* a rhodomontade out of measure extravagant, when we compare the two subjects of the contrast, justly occasioned Saul to view David with a jealous eye. We have all the reason in the world to believe that Samuel and the priests made every possible advantage of an adventure so fortunate for their intended king, to improve his growing popularity, which even at its outset had so far exceeded all bounds of decency : "What," said Saul, "can he have more but the kingdom?"† and we may therefore conclude that the king saw enough to alarm him ; for we are told, that "Saul eyed David from that day and forward,"‡ Thus we find that on the following day, while David played as usual on his harp before Saul, the king cast a javelin at him,§ which David avoided. Saul then made him captain over a thousand, saying, "Let not mine hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him :)|| an expression however which is evidently put into Saul's mouth, since it is impossible he could have made use of it openly. He made him the offer of his daughter Merab for his wife, in consequence of the defeat of Goliath ; but she, we know, not why, was given to another ;¶ afterwards he gave him Michal : and David's modesty** on this occasion was incomparably well acted ; he knowing himself, at the same time, to be secretly intended for the kingdom by Samuel.

Saul, upon reflection, concluding it dangerous to execute any open act of violence against this young hero, politically hoped to ensnare him, by exalting him high in favour, or to get rid of him by putting him upon his mettle, in performing feats of valour ; for a deficiency of valour is not to be numbered among David's faults. It was with this view that the king yet required of him an hundred Philistine foreskins,†† as the con-

* 1 Sam. xvii. 7. † Ch. xviii. 8. ‡ Ver. 9. § Ver. 11.
 || Ver. 17. ¶ Ver. 10. ** Ver. 23. †† Ver. 25. according
 to Josephus 600 heads.

dition of becoming his son-in-law. He produced double the number "in full tale."*

This demand, after David appears to have fulfilled the prescribed conditions, seems not only unjust, but also, even making allowance for Hebrew customs, very ridiculously expressed. It must have been a glorious sight to have seen David bring the foreskins to king Saul, strung perhaps on a piece of pack-thread, and dangling in his hand, or thrown across his shoulders like a sash: and if Miss Michal was present, how must her pretty little heart exult when the required number being told off, as many more were gallantly presented at her feet!

David still advanced in his military† reputation, and met with a powerful advocate in the person of Jonathan, his brother-in-law and faithful friend, who effected a temporary reconciliation between him and Saul;‡ at which time Saul swore he would no more attempt his life. Nevertheless, whether it was that he could not get the better of his jealousy, or that he discovered more than is transmitted down to us, we know not; consequences incline us to the last conjecture: Saul made two more attempts to kill him;§ from one of which he was protected by his wife Michal; and finding it not safe to stay at court, he fled to Samuel, in Ramah.|| Hither Saul sent messengers to apprehend him;¶ but these, it seems, seeing Samuel presiding over a company of prophets, and prophesying, were seized with a spirit of prophesying also; and not only so, but it is related that Saul finding this, went at last himself, to just the same purpose; for he likewise prophesied,** stripping off his cloaths, in which ridiculous condition he continued for a day and a night.

This is an extreme odd relation! That the solemn appearance of an assembly of prophets, presided over by a person so respectable, and heretofore of such

* 1 Sam. xviii. 27. † Ver. 30. xix. 8. ‡ Ver. 4. § Ver. 10, 11.
|| Ver. 18. ¶ Ver. 20. ** Ver. 22.

great authority in Judea, might influence, in an extraordinary manner, persons entrusted with a commission to apprehend or kill a man patronized by these prophets, exhibits nothing wonderful; they might easily perhaps, be prophesied out of their errand; and might then prophesy in concert. Prophecy is a vague term, not always limited to the prediction of future events; the extempore preaching of many dissenters, and the discourses of the Quakers, who profess to speak as the Spirit gives them utterance, seem to come under the term prophecy. These persons can work themselves and others into such fits of enthusiastic intoxication, that they believe themselves agitated by supernatural influence. Such might be the prophesying here mentioned. But Saul prophesied! so it is said. Had the subject of Saul's prophesying been transmitted down to us, it might have greatly illustrated this passage in the history; but no, he is barely said to have *prophesied*; and we are prudently left to guess what. Being thus at liberty, we, among other expositors, may easily surmise what he might take for his text, and was the general tenor of his discourse, on this particular occasion.

Afterward David had a private interview* with Jonathan; for he durst not venture to appear at court. At this meeting, Jonathan, who had conceived too great an affection for this man, and was at length seduced by him from the duty and allegiance which he owed to his father and king, solemnly promised† that he would sound his father's intentions on the next day, which being the festival of the new moon, David's attendance was expected at the king's table; and that he would warn him of any danger intended him. David lay hid in the field until Jonathan brought him the required intelligence; and when the king inquired concerning him, Jonathan as had been before concerted, said that he had requested leave to go and per-

* 1 Sam. xx. 1.

† Ver. 12.

form a family sacrifice at Bethlehem. Saul's reply on this occasion is very pertinent, and shows his antipathy to David not to have been the causeless inveteracy of a disordered mind. "Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said unto him, Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion, and unto the confusion of thy mother's nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom: wherefore now send and fetch him unto me; for he shall surely die."* Jonathan expostulated with his father, and had a javelin hurled at him for his reward.†

David being advertised; according to agreement, of the king's disposition toward him, retired to Ahimelech, the high priest, at the city of Nob;‡ who treated him with shew-bread, and armed him with the sword of Goliath, which had been hung up and consecrated to God.§

We may consider David's resuming this sword, after its dedication as a religious trophy, whatever gloss may be put on his interview with Ahimelech, to be a clear manifestation of hostile intentions, or a declaration of war against his father-in-law, for which he now took the first opportunity to prepare. Thus accoutred, he fled out of Judea, to Achish, king of Gath;|| intending, as we have good reason to believe, to enter into a treaty of alliance with him against the Hebrews; but the popular cry was against him before he accomplished any thing, or at least any thing that has reached our times. Here David appears to disadvantage in point of policy: for though his carrying with him the sword of Goliath was artful enough, and likely to collect followers in Judea, since it was a continual witness of that prowess which had gained him such

* Ver. 30, 31. Josephus in loco. † Ver. 33. ‡ 1 Sam. xxi. 1.
§ Ver. 9. Josephus. || Ver. 16.

extraordinary reputation; yet, for him, under this circumstance, to throw himself into the power of the Philistines, among those very people from whose champion he had ravished *that sword*, was the highest imprudence! and we perceive he might have suffered for it, had not he made use of a stratagem to procure his release, which he effected by acting the madman.* Mankind seems to have been very easily imposed on in those days.

David, now thinking it time openly to avow his design of disputing the crown with Saul, went to a cave called Adullam, which he appointed the place of rendezvous for his partizans. Here we are told he collected together a company of debtors, vagrants, and disaffected persons, to the number of four hundred; and opened his rebellion, by putting himself at the head of this body of men:† men, whose desperate situations under the government in being, rendered them fit agents to disturb it, and proved the surest bond to connect them to a partizan thus embarked in an enterprise against it. Hither also came to him his father and all his brethren; and the first movement that he made was to go to the king of Moab, to obtain a retreat for his father and mother, until he knew the event of his enterprise.‡

By the advice of the prophet Gad, David next marched into the land of Judah:§ Gad, no doubt hoped, that as the young adventurer was of that tribe, he would there meet with considerable reinforcement. When Saul heard of this insurrection, he pathetically laments his misfortune to those about him, that they, and even his son Jonathan, should conspire against him.|| Then started up one Doeg, an Edomite, who informed Saul, that he had seen David harboured by the priests in Nob.¶ Upon this, Saul summoned all those belonging to that city before him, with Ahime-

* 1 Sam. xxi. 13.

† Ch. xxii. 2.

‡ Ver. 2.

§ Ver. 5.

|| Ver. 7, 8.

¶ Ver. 9.

lech their chief, who began to excuse himself as well as he could; but Saul remembering, without doubt, the threatening of Samuel, concerning the affair of king Agag;* and considering these priests as traitors, from this corroborating evidence against them, he commanded them all to be slain, to the number of eighty-five persons.† Moreover, agreeable to the barbarous usage of that nation, the massacre included the whole city of Nob, man and beast, young and old, without exception.‡

Though the king's rage in this instance exceeded not only the bounds of humanity, but also of good policy, it nevertheless serves to show how deeply the priests were concerned in the rebellion of David; since he could not be mad enough to commit so flagrant an act, without some colourable pretence;§ and shows also that Saul had not so great an opinion of their holiness as we, at this distance of time, are, by their own annals, instructed to have. Had Saul been more implicit, he might have enjoyed the name of king, have continued the dupe of the priests, have died in peace, and his children have succeeded quietly to the inheritance. But,

“Ye gods! what havoc does ambition make

“Among your works!”

During this time, David rescued the city of Keilah from the Philistines,|| who were besieging it, hoping to make it a garrison for himself. But upon the approach of Saul, not thinking himself able to maintain it, being as yet but six hundred strong, and not choosing to confide in the inhabitants, whose loyalty even his recent kindness to them could not corrupt, he

* 1 Sam. xiii. 14. xv. 26, 28. † Ch. xxii. 16—18. ‡ Ver. 19.

§ In so small a territory as Judea, the difference between the king and his son-in-law, so popular a man, could not be unknown to persons in any measure removed from the vulgar. Therefore, Ahimelech's pleas of ignorance did not deserve credit.

|| 1 Sam. xxiii. 3.

therefore abandoned it, and retired to the wilderness.* This passage alone is amply sufficient to confirm the reality of David's rebellious intentions; it is, therefore, worth analyzing. That he delivered this city from the depredations of the Philistines, and that by this action he hoped to purchase the friendship of the inhabitants, are acknowledged: the use to which he intended to convert this friendship, is the point to be ascertained. Saul was advancing to suppress him. Had he seduced them from their allegiance, and obtained the expected protection, he would have deprived Saul of this city, which city might have been considered as a garrison. The old plea, of his providing only for his personal safety, against his malignant persecutor, has often been urged; but his intended retention of a city, to secure that safety, was a flagrant rebellious intention. Had he gained this one city, as his strength increased, he would have concluded as many more as he could have procured, necessary for his preservation, until he had monopolized the whole country, agreeable to the grant of Samuel, which would then have justified the usurpation; but disappointed in the first step, by the loyalty, miscalled treachery, of the Keilites, he evacuated the town, having lost the recompence of his labour, and with his men "went whithersoever they could go."† In the wilderness Jonathan came privately to see him, and piously engages in the cause against his own father, by covenant; in which it was agreed, that if David succeeded, of which Jonathan is very confident, *he* was to be a partaker of his good fortune;‡ but as Jonathan was not to join him openly, he went home again.

Saul, having received intelligence of David's retreats, pursued him from place to place, until he was called off by news of an invasion of the land by the Philistines;§ whether of David's procuring or not, we are uncertain: thus much is certain, and does not dis-

* 1 Sam. xxiii. 13. † ib. ‡ Ver. 16—18. § Ver. 27.

credit the supposition, that he quickly after took refuge among those Philistines. After repelling the invaders, Saul, however, returned to the wilderness of Engedi, in pursuit of David, with three thousand chosen men. At this place we are told of an odd adventure, which put the life of Saul strangely into the power of David. He turned in to repose himself* alone in a cave, wherein at that time, David and his myrmidons were secreted.† This, one would imagine to have been a fine opportunity for him to have given a finishing stroke to his fortune, by killing Saul, and jumping into the throne at once: but David knew better what he was about, than to act so rashly. He could entertain no hopes that the Jews would receive for their king a man who, with such great seeming holiness, should imbrue his hands in the blood of the Lord's anointed. Beside, what evidently destroys the boasted merit of David's forbearance toward Saul, in this instance, is an obvious, though overlooked consideration, that, compared with David, Saul had a strong army with him; and had the king been missing, had he been observed to enter the cave without coming out again; and upon search, had he been there found murdered, there would not have escaped, of all

* The words are, "to cover his feet:" which Josephus and others, mistake to mean, that he retired into the cave to ease nature. But in Judges, iii. 24. we find that expression to imply, that the servants of Eglon, king of Moab, supposed their master to have locked himself in, to repose himself with sleep, in his summer-chamber. This is farther corroborated, in Ruth, iii. 7. where, when Boaz had eaten his supper, he laid down on a heap of corn, doubtless to take his rest. Ruth, by her mother's instruction, went, uncovered his feet, and lay down by him—to have some refreshment likewise. For, in the middle of the night, when the man awaked, surprised at finding an unexpected bedfellow, and demanded who she was, the kind wench replied—"I am Ruth, thine hand-maid; spread therefore thy skirt over thine hand-maid, for thou art a near kinsman." In the present instance, it is evident, Saul slept in the cave; as he discovered not the operation that had been performed on his robe, till David called after him, to apprise him thereof.

† 1 Sam. xxiv. 3.

that pertained to David, any that *passed against the wall*. Of this David could not be insensible; and therefore, only privately cut off the skirt of Saul's robe,* and suffered him to depart in peace. When the king was gone out from the cave, David calls after him, and artfully makes a merit of his forbearance, protesting an innocency, to which his being in arms was, however, a flat† contradiction. Saul freely and gratefully acknowledges himself indebted to him for his life, and seems so well convinced of his own precarious situation, that he candidly confesses it; only tying him down with an oath,‡ not to destroy his children after him—an obligation which, in due time, we shall see in what manner remembered and fulfilled by David.

Saul must certainly have been greatly fatigued, or strangely overseen, to have let David catch him at so great a disadvantage—a conduct not usual with good generals. Yet, while we credit the relation, the meanness of his reply to David's harangue, can be no otherwise accounted for. Saul does not appear to have wanted resolution on other occasions; but to acknowledge his assurance that David would obtain the sovereignty, and poorly to entreat a fugitive rebel in behalf of his family! is a conduct not even to be palliated, but upon the foregoing supposition. We must either condemn the general or the king, neither of which characters appear with extraordinary lustre upon this occasion. David, on the other hand, dissembles admirably here, pretending to Saul a *great reverence* for the Lord's anointed, though conscious, at the same time, that *he was also* the Lord's anointed, and anointed purposely to supersede the other Lord's anointed; and, moreover, was at this very time aiming to put his election in force! But, as the people were not of his council, and he knew their great regard for religious sanctions, it was certainly prudent in him to set an example of piety, in an instance of

* 1 Sam. xxiv. 4.

† Ver. 8—15.

‡ Ver. 21.

which he hoped, in time, to reap the benefit himself. About this time Samuel died.*

We next find our young adventurer acting the chief character in a tragi-comedy, which will farther display his title to the appellation of being a Man after God's own heart.

There dwelt then at Maon, a blunt rich old farmer, whose name was Nabal. David hearing of him, and that he was at that time sheep-shearing, sent a detachment of his followers to levy a contribution upon him,† making a merit of his forbearance, in that he had not stolen his sheep, and murdered his shepherds.‡ Nabal, who, to be sure, was not the most courteous man in the world, upon receiving this extraordinary message, gave them but a very indifferent reply, including a flat denial. "Who," says he, "is David? and who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants now-a-days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give unto men whom I know not whence they be?"§ Upon receiving this answer, David, without hesitation, directly formed his resolution; and arming himself, with a number of his followers, vowed to butcher him, *and all that belonged to him*, before the next morning.|| And how was this pious intention diverted? Why, Abigail, the charming Abigail! Nabal's wife, resolved, unknown to her spouse, to try the force of beauty, in mollifying this incensed hero, whose disposition for gallantry, and warm regard for the fair sex, was probably not unknown at that time. Her own curiosity also might not be a little excited; for the ladies have at all times been universally fond of military gentlemen: no wonder, therefore, that Mrs. Abigail, the wife of a cross country clown, was willing to seize this opportunity of getting acquaintance with captain David.

* 1 Sam. xxv. 1.
§ Ver. 10, 11.

† Ver. 5—9.

‡ Ver. 7.

|| Ver. 13, 14—22.

And this motive certainly had its force, since she could not as yet have known David's intention: we may observe she was told of it by David at their meeting.* She prepared a present, and went to David, saying, very sententiously, "Upon me, my Lord, upon me let this iniquity be:"† judging, very humanely, that could she get him to transfer his revenge upon *her*, she might possibly contrive to pacify him, without proceeding to disagreeable extremities. Nor was she wrong in her judgment; for we are told, "So David received of her hand that which she had brought him, and said unto her, go up in peace to thine house; see I have hearkened to thy voice, *and have accepted thy person.*"‡ But however agreeable this meeting might have been to Abigail, we do not find that Nabal was so well pleased with the composition his wife had made for him; for when he came to understand so much of the story as she chose to inform him of, he guessed the remainder, broke his heart, and died in ten days afterward.§ David loses no time, but returned God thanks for the old fellow's death, and then Mrs. Abigail was promoted to the honour of being one of the Captain's ladies.||

We are now told another story extremely resembling that of the cave of En-gedi. Saul again pursues David with three thousand chosen men; again fell into his hands during his sleep; only that here David stole upon him in his own camp; he ran away with the king's spear and bottle of water, and Saul went back again as wise as he came.¶

The opinion of Mons. Bayle seems most probable concerning this adventure, who looks upon it but as another detail of the former affair at En-gedi; and that for very good reasons. For, upon a comparison of both, as laid down in the 23d, 24th, and 26th chapters of 1 Samuel, we may remark,

* 1 Sam. xxv. 34. † Ver. 24. ‡ Ver. 35. § Ver. 37, 38.
 || Ver. 39. ¶ Ch. xxvi.

I. That in each relation Saul pursues him with the same number of chosen men.

II. That both adventures happened at or very near the same place.

III. That in each story David comes upon Saul in much the same manner, withholds his people from killing him, and contents himself with taking away a testimonial of the king's having been in his power.

IV. That in the second account, when David is pleading the injustice of Saul's persecuting him, as he terms it, he does not strengthen his plea by representing to him that this was the *second time* of his sparing him, when he had his life so entirely in his power; and that Saul's pursuing him this second time, was a flagrant instance of ingratitude, after what had happened on the former occasion.

V. That in the second relation, Saul, when he acknowledges David's forbearance and mercy to him in the present instance, makes no mention of any *former obligation* of this kind, although it was so recent, and in the main circumstance so similar.

VI. That the historian, who evidently intended to blacken the character of Saul, and whiten that of David, does not make the least observation himself, in the second narrative, of reference to the first.

These reasons prove, beyond doubt, that we are furnished with two relations of the same adventure. To account for the double record, and their variations, must be left to commentators, connectors, and harmonizers, who are used to compromise affairs of this nature.

David finding that with his present strength, he was unable to maintain any footing in Judea, puts himself once more under the protection of Achish, king of Gath.* Achish, who does not appear to have been a very powerful prince, seemed to consider David alone, and David at the head of a little army, as two very

* 1 Sam. xxvii. 1—3.

different persons: for he now assigned him a place named Ziklag, for a habitation, where he remained a year and four months.*

As he had now a quiet residence, those who entertain an opinion of David's sanctity, would be apt to suppose he would here confine himself to agriculture, to composing psalms, and to singing them to his harp: but David found employment more suited to his genius. It is not intended here to be insinuated that he might not sing psalms, at leisure times; but his more important business was to lead his men out to plunder the adjacent country. We have the names of some nations, as they are called, but which must have been small distinct communities, like the present camps of wandering Moors and Arabs, over whom he extended his depredations: these are the Geshurites, the Gezrites, and the Amalekites.† Of these people he made a total massacre, at those places where he made his inroads; saying, very prudently, "Lest they should tell of us, saying, so did David, and so will be his manner, all the while he dwelleth in the country of the Philistines.‡" After thus carefully endeavouring to avoid detection, he brings his booty home, which consisted of *all* which those miserable victims possessed,§ He made presents of this to his benefactor king Achish,|| who, demanding where he had made his incursion, was answered, against the south of Judah, &c.¶ intending by this falsity to insinuate to the king his aversion to his own countrymen, and attachment to him. "And Achish believed David, saying, he hath made his people Israel utterly to abhor him; therefore he shall be my servant for ever."***

The Philistines at this time collected their forces together, to attack the Israelites. To which service Achish summoned David,†† and met with a cheerful

* 1 Sam. xxvii. 6, 7.

† Ver. 8.

‡ Ver. 9. 11.

§ Query, whether David might not compose a psalm upon this occasion.

|| Josephus.

¶ 1 Sam. xxvii. 10.

** Ver. 12.

†† Ch. xxviii. 1.

compliance ; "Surely," says David, "thou shalt know what thy servant can do.*" He accordingly marched his adherents with the troops of king Achish ; but when the princes of the Philistines saw a company of Hebrews in their army, they were much surprized, and questioned Achish concerning them. The account which Achish gave of them, did not satisfy the princes, who justly feared their captain might prove a dangerous auxiliary. "Make this fellow return," said they, "that he may go again to the place which thou hast appointed him, and let him not go down with us to the battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us : for wherewith should he reconcile himself to his master ; should it not be with the heads of these men ?"† David was accordingly dismissed, very much mortified at their distrust of him.‡

Here now was a signal evidence of David's righteousness ! The Hebrews, according to their own testimony, understood themselves to be the favourite people of God, and David is delivered down to us as a distinguished character for piety among this peculiarly esteemed people. Yet could this very man, without any hesitation, freely join himself and company, to an army of uncircumcised idolators, marching with hostile intentions against his countrymen ! His advocates indeed pretend, that had his offers been accepted, he would nevertheless have gone over to the Israelites, at the commencement of the battle : this is taking off the charge of one crime, by imputing to him another equally bad—a most base act of treachery ! As, however, the Israelites, on the foundation of their own intimacy with the Deity, thought they had no more obligations to a moral conduct towards the heathens, than the Roman Catholics now imagine they have to keep faith with heretics ; these advocates endeavour to preserve the piety of David's character, at the expence of what David, according to this method of arguing, did extremely well without, on all occasions ; namely, *honesty*.

* 1 Sam. xxviii. 2.

† Ch. xxix. 4.

‡ Ver. 8, 11.

Upon his return to Zik'ag, he found that, during his absence, the Amalekites had made reprisals upon him, and burnt Ziklag; and had carried off all the women captives.* But in the relation there is one remark well worth noting, which is that "they slew not any either great or small"†—so much more moderation had these poor heathens in their just revenge, than the enlightened David in his unprovoked insult. If they came to avenge so savage an insult, it shewed great consideration in them to spare the innocent, the guilty being absent: if they only came on the common principle of plunder, the bare comparison of the different treatment of the sufferers in each instance, speaks forcibly without amplification. Upon this misfortune, his band began to mutiny, and were on the point of stoning‡ him; when he, who knew how to soothe them, enquired of the Lord what he should do? and evaded their rage, by inspiring them with a resolution to pursue the Amalekites, and with the hopes of recovering all their losses. He, therefore, with four hundred picked men, set out on the pursuit, and by the way found a straggler§ who had fainted: after recovering him, they gained, by his means, intelligence of their route. David came upon them unexpectedly, at a place where they were, without apprehension, regaling themselves after their success: and though David's men recovered all they had lost, together with other booty, and found their wives and children unhurt: yet could not their captain resist so inviting an opportunity of gratifying his delight in blood-shedding: the pursuit and slaughter continued from the twilight (we know not whether of the morning or evening) of one day, until the evening of the next. None escaped but a party which rode upon camels.||

Of the spoil taken from these people, David sent presents to the elders of his own tribe of Judah, "and to all the places where David himself and his men were

* 1 Sam. xxx. 1. † Ver. 2. ‡ Ver. 6. § Ver. 11. || Ver. 17.

wont to haunt."* By which means he kept them attached to his interest.

The dispute between the Philistine and Hebrew armies, did not terminate but by the defeat of the latter, the death of Saul, and of three of his sons.†

Such was the catastrophe of king Saul ! a man advanced from the humble state of a shepherd, by the prophet Samuel, to be his deputy in the government of the Hebrew nation, under the specious name of king : a man, who allowing for the *peculiar complexion* of the people over whom he was placed ; does not, on the whole, seem to suffer by comparison with any other king in the *same* history ; or whose character appears to be stained with any conspicuous fault, except that he was one degree less cruel than his haughty patron : and was disobedient enough to endeavour to be in effect, what he was only intended to be in name. On the whole, he appears to have been strangely irresolute and inconsistent with himself ; and is perhaps represented more so than he might really have been : but the undertaking to render himself independent was an arduous task for one in his situation ; therefore his actions and professions might sometimes disagree. However, it is impossible to argue from every expression that may be produced ; we must form our judgment from leading events, and corresponding expressions ; and determine as they tally with probability. If Saul himself, however he is represented as subscribing to it, was really assured of David's destination to supersede him by divine decree, there was nothing left for him but resignation : Can man fight against God ? since therefore his continual aim was to destroy David, it argues against this assurance ; and if Saul himself was mad, surely his soldiers were not : how came he to find an army as mad as himself, to persecute the Lord's anointed.

We shall now have an opportunity to observe the conduct of our hero in a regal capacity. The death of

* 1 Sam. xxx. 31.

† Ch. xxxi.

Saul facilitated his advancement to a sovereignty, to which he had no pretension, either by the right of inheritance, which was claimed by Ish-bosheth, a remaining son of Saul; nor by popular election, which Saul himself had the shew of; but by the clandestine appointment of an old prophet; which inspired him with hopes, of which, by arms and intrigue, he at length enjoyed the fruition.

David had returned to Ziklag but two days, when on the third, there came to him an Amalekite, who officiously informed him of the event of the battle between the Israelites and Philistines. He owned himself to be the person who killed Saul, after his defeat, at his own request: he being already wounded. He hoped to be well rewarded for his news, by David; whose intentions were so well known, that he presented him with Saul's crown and bracelet*. But, alas! he knew not David, and perished in the experiment: David ordering him to be killed for daring to slay the Lord's anointed.† David's treatment of this Amalekite, is agreeable to the customary rules of politics; and has nothing therefore remarkable in it, farther than it is rendered so by peculiar circumstances. Saul was declared to be rejected by God, and David was the pretender to his throne; it may therefore be imagined by some, that this man might have had some claim to his private gratitude, especially considering the account the Amalekite gave of the matter.

Who can help smiling at the relation of David's tearing his clothes off his back, and bursting into a sorrowful lamentation for the death of a man, to whose destruction he had so freely offered to lend assistance but just before?

Upon this alteration of affairs, David, asking counsel of the Lord, was advised to leave Ziklag, and go to Hebron, one of the cities of Judah; whither he and all his men repaired.‡ There he got his partizans to

* 2 Sam i. 10.

† Ver. 15.

‡ 2 Sam. ii. 1.

anoint him king over Judah; at the same time that Abner, Saul's general, had, at Mahanaim, made Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, king over Israel.* It may be remarked here, that David did not seem to claim in right of the sacred unction bestowed on him long since by Samuel. He realized his title indeed, as soon as he could make it out, by the law of force: but if his divine title to the Hebrew crown was universally known, and if, as has been urged, Ish-bosheth had none at all, how came David's title not to be universally acknowledged? Did only one tribe believe in it? Yet David, with the divine grant, was obliged to obtain the sovereignty by arms and intrigue! just for all the world like the wicked, who attain their desires by exactly the same means, to all external appearance. Upon this division of the kingdom, a battle was fought at the pool of Gibeon, between the army of Ish-bosheth, commanded by general Abner, and that of David, headed by Joab: victory declared in favour of the latter, with small loss on either side, except that Joab lost his brother Ahasel, who was killed by Abner's own hand.†

We must here be content with general hints; being only informed that "there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker."‡ What very much conduced to this, was an ill-timed quarrel between king Ish-bosheth and general Abner, concerning one of Saul's concubines, with whom Abner had been too familiar:§ and his resentment of the notice taken of this amour, occasioned a treaty to be negotiated between him and David, whom Abner engaged to establish over all Israel.|| David accepted his offer, but demanded, as a preliminary, the restoration of his first wife Michal;¶ who, during the disputes between

* 2 Sam. ii. 4, 8.

§ 2 Sam. iii. 7.

† Ver. 17, 23.

|| Ver. 12.

‡ 2 Sam. iii. 1.

¶ Ver. 13.

him and Saul, had been espoused to another.* This demand he likewise made openly, by an express message to Ish-bosheth, who kindly complied with it: the poor man who had since married her, following her weeping all the way.†

It is impossible to avoid noting David's amorous disposition here; which could not be content with six wives, who bore him children ‡ (no mention of those who did not), but was yet so warm, that it took the lead even in his most important concerns.—We will not pretend to assign the cause of that sad disorder, the symptoms of which are described in the 38th Psalm.

After Abner had traitorously endeavoured to advance the interest of David§; he had an interview with him||; which, quickly after he returned, coming to the ears of Joab; he, who does not appear to have been acquainted with the secret spring which actuated Abner's zeal for the cause of David; represented to him the imprudence of admitting a man among them, who to all appearance came only as a spy. Unknown to David, he sent for him back again, and privately stabbed him, in revenge for the loss of his brother Asahel¶. This was a most base piece of treachery, worthy the servant of such a master: to assassinate a man in cool blood, in revenge for an action which was committed in the heat of battle, in self-defence, and even after fair warning given.

Upon the murder of Abner, David again acts the mourner **, which has a greater probability of being sincere now, than when he grieved for the unhappy Saul; because the false Abner was preparing to do him essential service, by betraying his master's cause. But the event proved full as advantageous to David; as will presently appear.

When Ish-bosheth and his friends heard of the fate of Abner, who had been the very life of their cause; it dejected all their spirits; and two villains, named

* 1 Sam. xxv. 44. † 2 Sam. iii. 15, 16. ‡ Ver. 2, &c.
§ Ver. 17. || Ver. 20. ¶ Ver. 27. ** Ver. 31, &c.

Rechab and Baanah, hoping to make their fortunes by the public calamity, went and murdered their master king Ish-bosheth, as he was reposing himself during the heat of the day, and brought his head to David*. But not reflecting on an obvious maxim in politics, they like the Amalekite before, who claimed the merit of killing Saul, soon found that he thought it advisable to punish the traitors, whatever he thought of the treason†.

Had David reflected on all the circumstances which led to this murder, with that tenderness becoming a person professing so much piety, his compunction would have greatly embarrassed him in the proper behaviour on this occasion. For if these two execrable villains deserved punishment, what did *he* merit who was the primary cause of so nefarious an action? Two poor rogues from subordinate views, effected by assassination what David sought at the head of an army, which naturally reminds us of the pirate and Alexander. So strangely do relative circumstances bias our judgment of things essentially alike. Had David aspired to no other sceptre than his shepherd's crook, the villains had not presumed on the usurper's gratitude; and Ish-bosheth, who was a quiet prince, might have reigned long an honour to himself and a blessing to his country.

Ish-bosheth does not appear to have been a man of parts, qualified to contend with such an antagonist as David; for nothing is recorded of him: Abner was the person who raised him; and had he lived, would as easily have deposed him, and though no qualifications are a security against assassination, yet, as in the case of another unfortunate monarch, Darius, king of Persia; such cowardly wretches generally take the advantage of precipitating misfortunes already commenced, that they may pay their court to the rising sun.

The murder of this unhappy son of an unhappy father

* 2 Sam. iv. 5, &c.

† Ver. 12.

advanced David to the dignity to which he aspired,* (though we shall see in a passage which reflects no great honour on him, that Saul had more sons yet living.) He was now in his thirty-eighth year; having reigned seven years and an half in Hebron † over the tribe of Judah;

Although David was now invested with that supremacy which had been the aim of his endeavours since the time that Samuel inspired him with the spirit of—ambition; yet could not his enterprising genius continue satisfied with such an exaltation. The first object of his attention now, was the city of Jerusalem, then inhabited by the Jebusites; (but it was of no importance who inhabited it, if David conceived a desire for it): this city he besieged, and the inhabitants relying on the strength of their fortifications, out of derision planted cripples on their ramparts to guard their walls; saying “except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither. †” Nevertheless David carried the place, and made it his chief city. §

N. B. He supplied himself with more wives and concubines out of his new acquisition. ||

While he was thus amorously engaged, the Philistines hearing that he was made king over all Israel, came and disturbed him; but David according to the usual term *smote them*; ¶ and his strokes were always sufficiently felt:

The comic tale of David's bringing home the ark will not be long dwelt upon; it may only be remarked, that it was brought on a new cart, drawn by oxen; and that Uzzah some way or other lost his life, or, as the text reads, was smote *by the Lord*,** for his impiety in saving the ark from being overturned. †† But

* 2 Sam. v. 3. 1 Chron. xi. 3. † 2 Sam. ii. 11.

‡ Chap. v. 6. Josephus. § Ver. 7. 9. 1 Chron. xi. 5. 7.

|| 2 Sam. v. 13. ¶ Ver. 20, 25. 1 Chron. xiv. 11.

** Query, whether the Lord did not sometimes smite by the hands of the priests. †† 2 Sam. vi. 7.

if "the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh into the heart;" the intention of Uzzah was indisputably good, and the alledged crime surely pardonable; the seeming exigency precluding all hesitation and reflection. Had the ark been really overturned for want of this careful prevention, Uzzah might then, it would be naturally imagined, have been rather *smote* for neglecting to save it. However, it was no longer trusted to prophane hands, but carried the remainder of the way upon the more holy shoulders of the Levites,* with great parade: attended by musicians, and by David himself who, dressed in a linen ephod, *danced before the Lord with all his might*:† and this, in such a frantic indecent manner, that he exposed his nakedness to the bye-standers. Wherefore his wife Michal sneered at him: "How GLORIOUS was the king of Israel to-day, who uncovered himself to-day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows SHAMELESSLY uncovereth himself.‡" David, it seems, was of a different opinion; for he told her he *would* play before the Lord; and would be yet *more vile* than she had represented him;—adding, "and of the maid-servants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honour."§ Some staunch zealots have very prudently spiritualized this part of David's answer, and given the mystical sense of it; the prophane, who are content with the evident signification of words, having construed it no otherwise than into an insinuation that he had no cause to be ashamed of what he exposed. Fie on them!

This story is concluded with a remark as odd as the rest of it:—"Therefore Michal, the daughter of Saul, had no child until the day of her death."|| For, if Michal had hitherto borne no children, neither to David, nor to her immediate husband, her barrenness

* 1 Chron. xv. 2, 15.

§ Ver. 22.

† 2 Sam. vi. 14.

|| Ver. 23.

‡ Ver. 20.

must have been constitutional; and, preceding her offence, could not be a punishment inflicted in consequence of it. Moreover, if, on the other hand, she *had* borne him children, and this disgrace to her was the consequence of a resolution made by her husband David, that she should have no more children *by him*: her quiet resignation, under this imposed widowhood, is by inference a high compliment on this poor woman's conjugal virtue! which was far from the historian's intention to bestow. Indeed there is great reason to credit Michal, and to believe that David really behaved with all the extravagance she ascribes to him: for she appeared before this affair as a discreet kind of a woman; no instance of folly being produced in her, unless the contrivances she made use of to save her husband from the effects of her father's rage may be allowed to bear such interpretation. Whatever judgment however is passed upon Michal's censure of David's behaviour in this procession, it showed great cruelty and ingratitude in him to fix so disgraceful a stigma on her; and not to make allowance for female indiscretion, the worst name that could be bestowed on her fault.

After this, David smote the Philistines, not sparing even Gath, that city which had so humanely protected him.* He then smote the Moabites, putting to the sword two-thirds of the nation, by causing them to lie prostrate on the ground, and measuring them by lines; "even with two lines measured he to put to death; and with one full line to keep alive."† so systematic was his wrath! Hadadezar, king of Zobah, was the next whom he smote; who being assisted by the Syrians of Damascus, he next smote them‡. Yet all this smiting and slaying is so obscurely mentioned, that we know nothing of the offences committed against this mighty chief, to excite such blood-thirsty indignation. Indeed, the cause is, without much difficulty, deducible from the produce of these wars, which

* Sam. viii. 1. 1 Chron. xviii. 1.

† 2 Sam. viii. 2.

‡ Ver. 3. 5. 1 Chron. xviii. 3, 5.

sufficiently indicate the nature of David's *thirst*. Great quantities of gold, silver, and brass, are said to have been brought to Jerusalem;* and the priests may with reason be supposed to be the instigators to these wars; since we find all the plunder surrendered to them.† We have therefore no cause to wonder at the exalted praises they have bestowed upon the instrument of their wealth. He is said to have "gat him a name, when he returned from smiting the Syrians."‡ —This may very easily be credited; but it is to be feared, that if the name he gat from the Jews, and that which he gat from the Syrians were compared, they would not accord extremely well together.

David was at this time seized with a *temporary* fit of gratitude toward a lame son of his old friend Jonathan, named Mephibosheth, to whom he restored all the private patrimony of his grandfather Saul, and took him into his family;§ not without due consideration, it is to be supposed; since by that means he kept him under his own eye. But this gratitude was not lasting; for upon an accusation preferred against him by his servant, David readily bestowed all Mephibosheth's possessions upon that servant;|| yet, when the accusation was found to be false, instead of equitably punishing the asperser of innocence, and reinstating Mephibosheth in his former favour, he restored to him but half the forfeiture of his supposed guilt,¶ leaving the villain Ziba in the quiet possession of the other half, as the reward of his treachery.—But of this in its proper place.

The next memorable act recorded of David, is the only acknowledged crime that he ever committed; all his other transactions being reputed "right in the eyes of the Lord."**

In the midst of an obscure detail of smiting and slaying; in revenge for the contemptuous treatment of

* 2 Sam. viii. 7, 8, 10. 1 Chron. xviii. 2, 4, 6, 8, 10.

† 2 Sam. viii. 11. 1 Chron. xviii. 11. ‡ 2 Sam. viii. 13.

§ Chap. ix. 1. || Chap. xvi. 4. ¶ Chap. xix. 29.

** 1 Kings xv. 5, compared with 1 Chron. xxi. 1.

some ambassadors, sent by him with compliments of condolence; but who, perhaps deservedly, were considered as spies; while Joab was with the army prosecuting the siege of Rabbah, a chief city of the Ammonites; David, then at Jerusalem, walking one evening on the roof of his palace, perceived from that eminence a handsome woman bathing herself.* Fired with the sight, he sent to enquire who she was: and understanding she was Bathsheba, wife to Uriah, who was at that time opportunely absent in the army under Joab, he caused her to be brought to him directly, (no ceremony in the case) and after gratifying his inclination, sent her home again.† Some time after, the woman finding herself with child, naturally informed the king of it. He, never at a loss for ways and means, immediately ordered Uriah home; ‡ of whom he enquired news concerning the operations of the campaign, and then dismissed him to his own house, sending after him a present of victuals.§ David intended the good man a little relaxation from the fatigues of war, that he might kiss his wife, and be cheated into a child more than he had a natural right to; but whether Uriah had received any intimation of the honour his Majesty had done him; or whether he honestly meant the self-denial which he professed, we are not advertised: however, Uriah would not go home but slept in the guard-room, with the king's servants.|| David took care to be informed of this, and questioned Uriah concerning the reason of it. Uriah urged a scruple of conscience against going to enjoy any indulgence at home, while the ark, Joab, and the army remained in tents in the open field.¶ He was detained another night; when David made him drunk,** waiting to see what effect that might have. It was still the same; Uriah, like many other drunken men, was resolved not to go home. David, finding him so obstinate, altered his plan of operations, and determined

* 2 Sam. xi. 2.

¶ Ver. 9.

† Ver. 4.

¶ Ver. 11.

‡ Ver. 6.

** Ver. 35.

§ Ver. 8.

then to get rid of him for ever. To which intent, he sent him back to the camp, with a letter to the general. "And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the fore-front of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten and die."* This instruction was accordingly complied with; † and then Bathsheba, like another Abigail, was taken into David's seraglio.‡

Nathan the prophet read David an arch lecture upon this subject;§ and he, who took care not to disagree with his best friends, bore with the reproof, and humbled himself accordingly.

This complicated crime committed by David is universally allowed; but people think so little for themselves, that even *this* would be qualified, were it not found ready condemned to their hand in the relation of it. This crime is given up too, as the *only stain* in David's character: but the circumstances of it will not permit this to be granted, abstracted from any consideration of the man. For, though a generally good man may, in a sudden start of any of the passions, lose government of himself so far, as to violate conjugal fidelity, or perhaps suddenly to kill another; yet a deliberate scheme, including *two* such crimes, can be concerted only by a *bad heart*. It is also to be remarked respecting his famous repentance of this black transaction, that he shewed no tokens of relenting until it was extorted from him by artifice! and that even then, though he mourned his crime, he never entertained a thought of relinquishing future commerce with the woman so wickedly obtained, but kept her until he died! and altered the regular course of succession, in favour of a son he had by her.||

It is hoped the supposition may be allowed, that the noise this righteous affair made, might be one motive for Joab's desiring David to come and partake some of the honours of the campaign:¶ an opportunity of

* 2 Sam. xi. 15.

† Ver. 17.

‡ Ver. 27.

§ Ch. xii. 1.

|| 1 Kings i. 13.

¶ 2 Sam. xii. 27, 28.

which he prudently laid hold : but—fatal was his presence wherever he appeared.

How shall a person subject to the feelings of humanity, (a security of more avail among men than the most binding laws) how shall a man, not steeled to a very Jew, find expressions suited to the occasion, when he relates the treatment of this poor city, Rabbah ? The study would be as difficult as unnecessary ; the simple unexaggerated tale, if seriously attended to, will shock the humane reader sufficiently. The city was taken and plundered ; and David “brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln : * and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon.”† The precise punishments here alluded to are not understood at this time : writers being much divided in their expositions of these words ; but that extraordinary punishments are meant, cannot admit of a doubt ; for though *believers* expound the putting the Ammonites *under* saws and harrows, into the making slaves of them, and that these were the tools with which they laboured ; yet this will not agree with the latter of the texts whose authority is mentioned in the note ; where it is said, that he [David] “CUT THEM with saws and with harrows of iron, and with axes.” And should more evidence be yet required, Josephus also writes, that “the men were put to death by exquisite torments.” The general truth of the fact stands therefore unimpeached. And is it thus the people of God, headed by a man styled, in a peculiar

* It is supposed that the ancient slavery of the Jews to the Egyptians, and the labour they were employed in by their lordly taskmasters, the making bricks, might be a current reproachful jeer upon the Jews, when any quarrel happened between them and their neighbours ; and that the making their prisoners pass through the brick-kiln, was a cruel method of revenging such affronts. A conjecture not improbable.

† 2 Sam. xii. 31. 1 Chron. xx. 3.

inanner, *the man after God's own heart*, used the prisoners of war? *Bella! horrida bella!*

It would not be easy to select any period of any history more bloody, or abounding more in wickedness of various dyes than that which is the object of the reader's present attention. Instances succeed so quick that the relation of one is scarcely concluded, but fresh ones obtrude upon notice.—But now horrors of a different hue demand our attention.

Ammon, one of our hero's sons, ravished his sister Tamar, and then turned her out of doors.* Absalom, her brother by the same mother, seemingly took no notice of it, until two years after; when he invited all his brothers to a feast at his sheep-shearing; where he made Ammon drunk, and murdered him.† so deliberate, and yet so determined was his revenge! Absalom on this account, fled out of Judea, for three years:‡ until, at the intreaty of Joab, he was invited home again by his father, whose favourite he was.§ But though he returned to Jerusalem, yet would not his father see him for two years more.||

Absalom, during his exile, conceived a design of deposing his father; for after their reconciliation, his first attention was to render himself popular. To this end he set up a splendid equipage:¶ but politically increased his affability with his magnificence: rising up early, and planting himself in the way, to salute all who came to his father's levee. Of these he kindly enquired their business, or grievances; throwing out hints of the king's remissness in the execution of justice, and how uprightly *he* would conduct himself, were their causes to be determined by *him*.** The profession of piety is universally, and was in particular among this people, the most successful disguise for crafty designing men to assume. When Absalom, therefore, thought his scheme sufficiently ripe for exe-

* 2 Sam. xiii. 14

§ Chap. xiv. 21, 24.

** Ver 2. 4.

† Ver. 28.

|| Ver. 28.

‡ Ver. 38.

¶ Chap. xv. 1.

cution, he desired leave of his father to go to Hebron, to perform a vow made by him while a refugee in Syria.* At Hebron he set up his standard, and his followers assembled in such numbers, and the defection was so general, that David thought it adviseable to retire from Jerusalem.†

With him he took all his family and dependants, except ten concubines, whom he left in his palace to keep house‡. The priests, Zadock and Abiathar, with the ark, would also have gone with him; but he thought it would be more for his service for them to remain in the city as spies; to send him intelligence how matters went.§ It is no inconsiderable part of politics to know how to suit men with proper employments, Ahitophel, his prime minister, joined the malecontents||; to balance which misfortune, David prevailed on Hushai, a trusty man of some importance, to remain in the city, that he might ingratiate himself with Absalom, thwart the counsels of Ahitophel, and transmit intelligence to him from time to time through the conveyance of the priests, whose sons were to carry on the correspondence.¶ Having concerted matters thus, he evacuated Jerusalem, and Absalom entered** it.

When David was upon his journey from the city, he was met by Ziba, servant to Mephibosheth, with asses and provisions for his majesty's accommodation in his retreat††: of whom, when David enquired why Mephibosheth did not come with him; this treacherous servant told him that he staid behind at Jerusalem, hoping to obtain the kingdom of his grandfather, during this disturbance ‡‡: by which lying aspersion, he gained a grant of all his master's possessions.

Here we may introduce a circumstance, which is so far material, as it serves to shew, that the sanctity of David was not quite so universally assented to, as may be imagined, while he was living; and his actions

* 2 Sam. xv. 7. † Ver. 12, 14. ‡ Ver. 16. § Ver. 27, 28,
 || Ver. 12, 31. ¶ Ver. 32, &c. ** Ver. 37,
 †† 2 Sam. xvi. 1. ‡‡ Ver. 3.

not only fresh in memory, but more perfectly known, than possibly, was prudent to transmit to these distant ages.

As David prosecuted his flight, he was met by a man of Saul's family, whose name was Shimei. This man as he came on, kept muttering curses between his teeth, and at length cast stones at the King and his attendants, calling out to him, "Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial; the Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned, and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son; and behold thou art taken in thy mischief because thou art a bloody man"*. This is pathetic, and truly characteristic of the person to whom the speech was addressed. Some of his retinue were at the point of silencing this brawler with the "ultima ratio regum†;" but David prevented it‡, wisely considering this not to be a season for proceeding to extremities.

Absalom, in the mean time, being come to Jerusalem, like a buck of spirit, took the damsels which his father had left to keep house, and cuckolded the old man by way of bravado, on the top of it§; in a tent erected for this heroic purpose!

Ahitophel advised Absalom to select twelve thousand men, and pursue David directly, before he had time to recover his surprize||; which was certainly the best resolution that could have been formed. But Hushai, as was concerted, proposed a different plan of operations; opposing to the former, the well known valour and military skill of the old king; and the hazard of making him and his men desperate¶. He advised a collection of all the troops in the kingdom; that success might be in a manner insured; and that Absalom should command them in person. By which

* 2 Sam. xvi. 7. 8.

† The motto on French cannon.

‡ 2 Sam. xvi. 9, 10.

§ Ver. 21, 22. || Chap. xvii. 1.

¶ Ver. 8.

means, he affirmed that they should overwhelm David and his party, wherever they found him.* Hushai gained the ascendancy ; and when he knew that his scheme was accepted, he gave immediate notice to the priests : † with instructions for David how to conduct himself. ‡ David divided his forces into three bodies ; commanded by Joab, Abishai, and Ittai : but by the prudent care of his men, was not permitted to hazard his person, by being present in action. § When he had reviewed his army, he gave his generals especial charge to preserve the life of Absalom ; and with a policy that reflects honour upon his military knowledge, expected the enemy in the wood Ephraim : || a covert situation, being the most judicious that could be chosen, for a small army ¶ to encounter one more numerous. David's men were tried veterans, among whom were the remains of those who served under, and lived with him at Gath ; ** whereas, Absalom's army must have consisted chiefly of fresh men. The battle decided in favour of David ; †† with great slaughter of the rebel army : and as Absalom fled on a mule, his hair, which is celebrated for its beauty and quantity, entangled in the boughs of an oak, and he remained suspended in the air ; while his mule ran away from between his legs. ‡‡ He was observed in this condition by a man who went and told Joab ; and he, who consulted the safety of David, rather than his parental weakness in behalf of an unnatural son, killed Absalom with a dart. §§

David grieved immoderately for this reprobate son, on whom he had misplaced a great affection : ||| and though he had *acted* the mourner on several former occasions, this is the only one, in which his sincerity need not be questioned. It is true, he might be really concerned at the murder of Abner ; but then circum-

* 2 Sam. xvii. 11.

† Ver. 15.

‡ Ver. 16.

§ Chap. xviii. 1—3

|| Ver. 4—6.

¶ According to Josephus, David had but four thousand men.

** 2 Sam. xv. 18.

†† Chap. xviii. 7.

‡‡ Ver. 9.

§§ Ver. 14.

||| Ver. 33. Chap. xix. 4.

stances ought to be attended to; Abner was killed prematurely; he had not finished his treacherous negotiation; David had much to hope from him; but—when his expectations had been answered, it is far from being improbable, that he would have found an opportunity himself to have got rid of a man, on whom he could have placed no reliance. But to return.

David was roused from his lamentations by the reproaches of his victorious general,* who flushed with success, told him the truth, but, perhaps, told it too coarsely. It is evident that Joab now lost the favour of his master, which the murder of Abner, the killing Absalom in direct contradiction to David's express order; and lastly, his want of sympathy, and his indelicacy in the present instance, were the apparent causes.

After the battle, he invited Amasa, Absalom's vanquished general, to return to his duty: very imprudently and unaccountably promising him the chief command of his army in the stead of Joab;† which was seemingly but an unthankful return for the victory that officer had just gained him, and for his attachment to his interest all along. Amasa, it is true, was a near relation; but Joab, according to Josephus, stood in the same degree of consanguinity; they being both the sons of David's sisters, this offer must therefore have been rashly influenced by his resentment against Joab, as before mentioned.

The remains of Absalom's scattered army dispersed to their homes in the best and most private manner they could:‡ but David inadvertantly plunged himself into fresh troubles, by causing himself to be conducted home by a detachment from the tribe of Judah.§ This occasioned disputes between that and the other tribes. They accused Judah of stealing their king from them.|| Judah replied, that they gave their attendance, because the king was of their tribe; and that it

* 2 Sam. xix. 5—7.

§ Ver. 11, 15.

† Ver. 13.

|| Ver. 41,

‡ Ver. 3.

was their own free will*: the others rejoined that they had ten parts in the king, and that their advice should have been asked as to the bringing him back.† At this juncture, one Sheba took advantage of the discontent, “and blew a trumpet, and said, we have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to his tent, O Israel.”‡ The consequence of this, was a second insurrection. Amasa was ordered to assemble an army to suppress it; but not proceeding with the desired speed, Abishai was afterward commissioned with the same trust; Amasa and Abishai met and proceeded together, and were joined by Joab and his men. But Joab, not thoroughly liking to serve under a man he had so lately vanquished, and having as few scruples of conscience as his old master, made short work, stabbed Amasa, and re-assumed the command of the whole army.§

Being once again supreme in command, Joab proceeded directly to the reduction of the malecontents who shut themselves up in the city of Abel of Bethmaacha: he battered the town, but by the negociation of a woman, the inhabitants agreed to throw Sheba's head to him over the wall; which they performed;|| and thus was quiet once more restored. Joab returned to Jerusalem, where we are told that he was general over all the host of Israel.¶ Not a syllable appears of any notice taken by David of the murder of the general by himself appointed: and of the assassin's usurping the command of the army.

Not finding room in its proper place, it shall now be noticed, that when David was returning to Jerusalem from the reduction of Absalom's rebellion; with the men of Judah, who came to escort him, Shimei, the Benjamite,** joined him at the head of a party of his own tribe. This man, who at a former meeting, so freely bestowed his maledictions on David when a fugitive: upon this change of circumstances, reflecting

* 2 Sam. xix. 42.

† Ver. 43.

‡ Chap. xx. 1.

§ Ver. 7, 9.

|| Ver. 16, 16, &c.

¶ Ver. 23. ** Ver. 16.

on the king's vindictive temper, came now to make his submission: David accepted his acknowledgements, and confirmed his pardon with an oath.*

We shall have occasion to refer to this passage anon.

Mephibosheth came also to welcome David on his return, and undeceive him with regard to the false Ziba's representation of him;—but he appears to have met with no other redress, than a remittance of *half the grant* made to Ziba of his estate.†

These intestine troubles put David upon pondering how to secure himself, as far as he could forecast, from any future disturbance.

It is the part of good politicians, not only to form wise designs themselves, but also to make proper advantage of public occurrences, that all events indiscriminately may, more or less, lead to the purposes wanted to be obtained. Of this policy we shall observe David to be mindful, in the ensuing transaction. Not that a panegyric upon his contrivance in this instance is by any means intended; for certainly a more barefaced transaction was never exhibited: such indeed as could only have been attempted among the poor bigoted Jews. It is sufficient, however, that it answered David's purpose; than which more could not have been expected from the most complete stroke that refined politics ever produced. But view it in a moral light, and certainly a blacker piece of ingratitude and perfidy can hardly be imagined. It was impossible to continue the narrative without prefacing thus much.

David having with much trouble, from his competition with Ish-bosheth, established himself upon the Jewish throne; and having in the latter part of his reign been vexed, and driven to disagreeable extremities, by the seditious humour of his subjects, the rebellion of his own son Absalom, and the revolt of

* 2 Sam. xix. 23.

† Ver. 29.

Sheba; his mind now fell a prey to suspicion. He called to remembrance that some of Saul's family were yet living; whom, lest they should hereafter prove thorns in his side, he concluded it expedient to cut off.

Whenever David projected any scheme, a religious plea, and the assistance of his old friends,* were never wanting. A famine befel Judea, which continued three years: probably occasioned by the preceding intestine commotions. "David inquired of the Lord: and the Lord answered, it is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites."† But where is this crime recorded? Samuel charged Saul with no such slaughter: he reproached him with a contrary fault, an act of *mercy*! which is assigned as one of the reasons for deposing him. So that this crime was not recollected,‡ till many years after the man was dead! and then God punishes—whom? a whole nation, with three years famine: which, by the by, was not sent as a punishment neither; but merely as a hint of remembrance, which ended in hanging the late king's innocent children!

The oracular response dictated no act of expiation; but only pointed out the *cause* of the famine. So that the Gibeonites (who, by the way, had hitherto made no complaints that we know of) were applied to§ for a knowledge of what recompence they demanded. They required no gifts, neither that for their sakes David should kill any man in Israel (which

* The prophets and priests.

† 2 Sam. xxi. 1.

‡ If God sought vengeance for a particular act of cruelty perpetrated by Saul: when was vengeance demanded for David's massacre of the Edomites, the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Jebusites, and others, who at times became the object of David's wrath?—That the charge may allude to some former affair, is not contested; it is, however, truly remarkable, that there should be no chronological record of a fact, which after such a length of time demanded an expiation so awfully hinted, and so extraordinary in its circumstances!

§ 2 Sam. xxi. 2, 3.

qualifying expressions seems artfully intended; since they only required David to *deliver* the men to *them*, that *they* might kill them); but that seven of Saul's sous should be surrendered to them, that they might hang them up—*unto the Lord*.* David, not withheld by any motives of gratitude toward the posterity of his unhappy father-in-law, but in direct violation of his oath at the cave of En-gedi,† granted the request he must himself have instigated,‡ sparing only Mephibosheth, who luckily was so unfortunate as to be a cripple, and so much a dependant on David, and kept under his own eye, that he had no room for apprehension from him. He therefore reserved Mephibosheth, in memory of another oath between him and his father Jonathan. Mephibosheth having such a shocking scene to contemplate, and, considering his decrepitude, might (as he really was) with little hazard be preserved, as an evidence of probity in this pious king.

A conscience of convenient flexibility is of great use: thus David being under obligation by two oaths, forgot one, and remembered the other. When Creon, in *Œdipus*, was interrogated concerning his conscience, he replied—

—“ 'Tis my slave, my drudge, my supple glove,
My upper garment, to put on, throw off,
As I think best: 'tis my obedient conscience.”

David, now thinking himself securely settled, was moved both by God§ and by Satan,|| to cause his subjects to be numbered: which is, oddly enough, imputed as a great sin in him to require: for, poor man, according to the premises, he was but a passive instrument in the affair. Even David should have his due. The prophet Gad called him to account for it; and as a punishment for this sin of compulsion,

* 2 Sam. 6. † 1 Sam. xxiv. 21, 22. ‡ 2 Sam. xxi. 6.
§ Chaps. xxiv. 1. || 1 Chron. xxi. 1.

propounded to him for his choice three kinds of plagues, one of which *his subjects* thereby necessarily incurred—seven years famine, three months persecution from enemies, or three days pestilence.* David chose the latter.

It may be as well to decline this story, as to enter into any more particular consideration of it. From the above state of the case, the intelligent reader will need no assistance in making his own private reflections on it.

We have now attended David down to the decline of his life: when his natural heat so far decayed, that no addition of clothing† could retain a proper degree of warmth. His physicians prescribed a young woman to cherish him in his bed, by imparting to him a share of juvenile heat.‡ This remedy may be very expedient in cases of extreme age: but why beauty should be a necessary part of the prescription is difficult to conceive. They sought a *fair damsel*; and the damsel they found, was *very fair*.§ Possibly David might himself direct the delicacy of the choice: but if his physicians intended it as a compliment to their master, it indicated a very insufficient knowledge of the animal œconomy: thus to stimulate the old man, and harass a carcase already sufficiently worn out: whereas a virgin of homelier features, at the same time that she would have furnished an equal degree of warmth, would have been less liable to put wicked thoughts in the patient's head.|| However, the historian has taken care to inform us, that “the king knew her not.”¶ an assertion, which, from the premises, there does not appear any reason to controvert.

* 2 Sam. xxiv. 13. 1 Chron. xxi. 12. † 1 Kings, i. 1.

‡ Ver. 2. § Ver. 8, 4.

|| “Boerhaave frequently told his pupils that an old German prince, in a very infirm state of health, being advised to lie between two young virtuous virgins, grew so healthy and strong, that his physicians found it *necessary* to remove his companions.”

Mackenzie on Health, p. 70, Notes.

¶ 1 Kings, i. 4.

While the king lay in this debilitated extremity of life, he was destined to experience yet another mortification from his children. Adonijah his eldest son, since the death of Absalom, taking advantage of his father's incapacity, foolishly assumed the title of king,* which, had he been a little less precipitate, would have soon fallen to him, perhaps, without contest. For though David afterwards is represented as having secret intentions to alter the succession, yet the countenance shewn to his pretension by Joab, the general, by Abiathar the priest, and even by all his other brothers,† seem to indicate, that had Adonijah been more prudent, we should not now have heard so much of the wisdom of Solomon. It is possible Adonijah might, even as it was, have maintained his anticipated dignity, had he not, like Saul before, slighted his most powerful friends. He made an entertainment, to which he invited all his brothers, except Solomon;‡ but what ruined him, was his not inviting Nathan the prophet; it was *there* the grudge began: and the exclusion from this merry bout, and the confidence of the party, caused the prophet's loyalty to exert itself,§ which might probably have been suppressed by a due share of Adonijah's good cheer.

Let not the writer be accused of putting a malicious construction upon every transaction he produces. Pray, reader, turn to your bible: in the tenth verse of the first chapter of the first book of Kings, you will find a remark that Nathan was not called to the feast. The very next verse begins, "Wherefore, Nathan spake unto Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon," &c. He was certainly nettled at the slight put on him, and some others, in not being invited to Adonijah's feast, else he would not have insisted on that circumstance; which had better been waved. The supposition is not so ridiculous as has been represented; for surely the probability of Nathan's being corrupted, was not

* Ver. 5. † Ver. 9, 19, 25. ‡ Ver. 9, 10. § Ver. 11.

less than that of David's sons ; who, yet, all of them, except Solomon, (who, had he been invited, had some private reasons to the contrary, which their proceedings shew them to have been aware of) were agreeable to settling the succession on their elder brother ; though certainly as much interested in the disposal of the kingdom, as Nathan could be.

Nathan and Bathsheba concerted to inform David of this matter ; * where the affronted prophet could not forget the slight put upon him ; but, it being foremost in his mind, he insists upon the circumstance of exclusion, in an earnest manner ; " But me, even ME, thy servant, and Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and thy servant Solomon, hath he not called ; " † which spake the cause of his officious loyalty but too plainly. David here acknowledges the promise by which he waved the right of primogeniture in favour of Solomon, Bathsheba's son. ‡ He now directed him to be set upon a mule, to be proclaimed and anointed king of Israel, by his appointment. § The acclamations of the people upon this raree-shew disturbed the opposite party at their table ; and an event, so unexpected, quite disconcerted them : they all dispersed ; || Adonijah ran to the tabernacle, and took sanctuary at the altar. He obtained of Solomon a conditional promise of pardon, ¶ depending on his good behaviour. **

And now, methinks, some gentlewoman, of more than feminine patience, whose curiosity may have prevailed with her to proceed thus far, may here exclaim ; " It must be granted, Sir ! that David had his faults ; and who has not ? but what does that prove ? only that he was a man. If he was frail, his repentance was exemplary ; as you may perceive, if you can pre-

* 1 Kings i. 13. † Ver. 26. ‡ Ver. 30. § Ver. 33, 36.
 || Ver. 41, 49, 50. ¶ Ver. 52.

** Solomon soon found a pretence, ridiculous enough, but sufficient in his eyes, to get rid of Adonijah, when his father was dead.

vail with yourself to read some of his psalms. Indeed, after your ill-treatment of the scripture, it will avail little to tell you that you contradict those inspired penmen, who expressly stile David, *the Man after God's own heart*. Nay, your writing against him, under that epithet, shews sufficiently the rancour and impiety of *your heart*; so that I am fearful there are small hopes of reclaiming you.'—Good Madam! hear me calmly, and we shall part excellent friends yet. Had David not been selected from the rest of mankind, why then—it is possible—hardly possible—he might pass in the gross, with the rest of the Jewish kings. But, when he is exalted and placed in a conspicuous point of view, as an eminent example of piety! he then necessarily attracts our notice in an especial manner, and we are naturally led to wonder, that a more happy subject of panegyric had not been chosen. If he was an holy psalmist; if he is styled the Man after God's own heart; he also lived the life here exhibited: and his capability of uniting such contrarities, does but augment his guilt!

Yet, even in his psalms, he frequently breathes nothing but blood, and the most rancorous resentment against his enemies. Of these take a specimen or two, from the elegant *ekeings* out of that transcendent pair of geniuses, Messrs. Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins; in recommendation of whose version, and the taste of our countrymen, it may be truly affirmed, that their psalms have gone through more editions than the works of any other poet, or brace of poets, whatever.

PSALM lxxviii. 22—24.

And he shall wound the head of all
His enemies also,
The hairy scalp of such as on
In wickedness do go.

From Basan I will bring, said he,
My people and my sheep,
And all my own, as I have done,
From dangers of the deep.

And make them dip their feet in blood
Of those that hate my name;
The tongues of dogs they shall be red
With licking of the same.

Again, in PSALM lxi. 24—27.

Lord, turn their table to a snare,
To take themselves therein,
And when they think full well to fare,
Then rap them in their gin :
And let their eyes be dark and blind,
That they may nothing see ;
Bow down their backs, and let them find
Themselves in thrall to be :

Pour out thy wrath as hot as fire,
That it on them may fall,
Let thy displeasure in thine ire
Take hold upon them all.

As desarts dry their house disgrace,
Their seed do thou expel,
That none thereof possess their place,
Nor in their tents once dwell.

Very pious ejaculations for the whole congregation
to *sing to the praise and glory of God!*

David's failings, as they are qualifyingly termed, are generally mentioned as exceptions to the uniform piety of his character : but, if David ever performed any truly laudable actions, *those* are the real exceptions to the general baseness which stains the whole of a life uncommonly criminal.

The writer does not pledge himself to reconcile rapine and cruelty, with morality and religion ; there are Commentators who love these knotty affairs ; to them they are left. When the vindictive tenor of any of David's psalms has been insisted on, the translation is immediately censured ; prudently enough ; as every one who has sense to perceive the incongruity between such bloody wishes and denunciations, and the acknowledged purity and mercy of the All-beneficent Father of Nature, may not have learning enough to dispute about Hebrew points, and to make them point what meaning he pleases. However, such a one, by

comparing the labours of Hebrew critics, may yet be enabled to form some sort of judgment between them. For instance, in that terrible 109th psalm, it is certain our Doctors in Divinity do not like it: but something must be done with it: some, therefore, say, that the verbs are not translated in their proper tenses, and that prophetic declarations are thus mistaken for the Psalmist's execrations: others again say, that to be sure they *are* imprecations, but not the imprecations of David; but those of his enemies on him, which he there only relates! O happy men! why do not we all learn Hebrew? His exemplary repentance is pleaded; is it any where to be found but in the psalms? "By their fruits ye shall know them." If David was ever truly pious, we shall certainly perceive it in his behaviour on his death-bed. *There*, it is to be hoped, we shall find him forgiving his enemies, and dying in charity with all mankind. This is what all mankind in general make a point of, from the saint to the malefactor. David, therefore, must certainly give us an extraordinary instance of his attention to this important evidence of contrition, But what shall we think, when we see this Nero of the Hebrews die in a manner uniform and consistent with the whole course of his life? What will be our reflections, when we find him, with his last accents, delivering two cruel and inhuman murders in charge to his son Solomon? Murders still further aggravated by the included crimes of ingratitude and perjury! one of them to be executed on his old faithful general, Joab, who powerfully assisted him on all occasions, and who adhered to him in all his extremities, till at the last, when he had justifiable cause for chagrin: but who, notwithstanding, had not appeared against him in actual hostility; but only drank a glass of wine with the malcontents. It will avail nothing to plead the private faults of the man; we are now to consider him as relative to David, in his public capacity. In which light we must loath the master, who died me-

ditating black ingratitude against so faithful, so useful a servant. For even his defection at last may, perhaps, admit of being interpreted into a patronization of that particular plan for the succession, rather than into a rebellion against the superannuated monarch.

His other charge was against Shimei, who reviled David at his retreat from Jerusalem, during Absalom's rebellion; but who made his submission to him, when he returned victorious: and whose pardon David had sealed with a solemn oath.*

Attend we now to the cause of these reflections.

After exhorting Solomon on his death-bed, to keep the statutes of the Lord, David proceeds:

"Moreover, thou knowest also what Joab, the son of Zeruiah, did to me, and what he did to the two captains of the hosts of Israel, unto Abner the son of Ner, and unto Amasa the son of Jether, whom he slew, and shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that was about his loins, and in his shoes that were on his feet."

"Do therefore according to thy wisdom, AND LET NOT HIS HOAR HEAD GO DOWN TO THE GRAVE IN PEACE."†

This was afterwards fulfilled in the basest manner, by the administrator to this pious testament.

David concludes thus:

"And behold, thou hast with thee Shimei, the son of Gera, a Benjaminite of Bahurim, which cursed me with a grievous curse, in the day when I went to Mahanaim; but he came down to meet me at Jordan, and I sware to him by the Lord, saying, I will not put thee to death with the sword:

"Now, therefore, hold him not guiltless: for thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him; BUT HIS HOAR HEAD BRING THOU DOWN TO THE GRAVE WITH BLOOD.‡"—That is to say, 'It is true, *I* promised not to put him to death, but *thou* art a wise man, and knowest what *thou* oughtest to do; *thou* knowest thyself not to be

* 2 Sam. xix. 23.

† 1 Kings ii. 5, 6.

‡ Ver. 8, 9.

'bound by that obligation ; therefore his hoar head,' &c. So saying, he expired.

This command was also executed in a manner, worthy the son of **Such a Father!**

To take a retrospect view of the foregoing narrative ; in few words may be seen the sum total of the whole. A shepherd youth is chosen by a disgusted prophet to be the instrument of his revenge on an untractable king. To this end, he is inspired with ambitious hopes, by a private inauguration ; is introduced to court, in the capacity of a harper ; and by knocking down a man with a stone, whom, if he had missed once, he had four more chances of hitting, and from whom, at the last, he could have easily ran away ; he was advanced to the dignity of son-in-law to the king. So sudden and unlooked for a promotion, within sight of the throne, stimulated expectations already awakened ; and Saul soon perceived reasons to repent his alliance with him. Being obliged to retire from court, he assembled a gang of ruffians, the acknowledged outcasts of their country, and became the ringleader of a lawless company of banditti. In this capacity he seduces his brother-in law, Jonathan, from his allegiance and filial duty ; and covenants with him, that if he obtained the kingdom, Jonathan should be the next person in authority under him. He obtains a settlement in the dominions of a Philistine prince, where instead of applying himself laudably to the arts of cultivation, he subsists by plundering and butchering the neighbouring nations. He offered his assistance to the Philistine armies, in the war against his own country, and father-in-law ; and is much disgusted at their distrust of his sincerity. He, however, availed himself of the defeat and death of Saul, and made a push for the kingdom. Of this he gained only his own tribe of Judah : but strengthened by this usurpation, he contested the remainder with Saul's son, Ishbosheth, whom he persecuted to the grave : Ishbosheth being assassinated by two villains, with intention to pay their

court to the usurper. He is now king of Israel : in which capacity he plundered and massacred all his neighbours round him at discretion. He defiled the wife of one of his officers, while her husband was absent in the army : and finding she was with child by him, he, to prevent a discovery, added murder to adultery ; which being accomplished, he took the widow directly into his well-stocked seraglio. He then repaired to the army, where he treated the subjected enemies with the most wanton inhumanity. A rebellion is raised against him by his son Absalom, which he suppressed, and invited over the rebel-general, to whom he gave the supreme command of his army, to the prejudice of the victorious Joab. After this he cut off the remainder of Saul's family, in defiance to the solemn oath by which he engaged to spare that unhappy race ; reserving only one cripple, from whom he had no apprehensions : and who, being the son of Jonathan, gave him the opportunity of making a merit of his gratitude. When he lay on his death-bed, where all mankind resign their resentments and animosities, his latest breath was employed in dictating two posthumous murders to his son Solomon ! and, as if one crime more was wanting to complete the black catalogue ; he cloathed all his actions with the most consummate hypocrisy : professing all along the greatest regard for every appearance of virtue and holiness.

These, Christians ! are the outlines of the life of a Jew, whom you are not ashamed to continue extolling as a man after God's own heart !

This Britons ! is the king to whom your late excellent monarch* has been compared !

What an impiety to the Majesty of Heaven !

What an affront to the memory of an honest prince !

It is with great joy the writer of these memoirs takes his leave of a story, with which, by this time, he is sufficiently disgusted. He entered upon it, however, from honest motives ; and he concludes it with the consciousness of having performed a work, which he

flatters himself will prove acceptable to all who entertain adequate conceptions of the eternal rectitude of that great Creator of the universe, whom they profess to adore. He despises all the pious ravings and anathemas which have been thundered against him by some reverend inquisitors: he expected them, has exposed them; and hopes he may, without offence finally reply in the words of their forgotten master, "Father forgive them, for they *know not** what they do." Those who estimate a man's religion by his implicitness to prescribed notions, and who think it their duty to stifle their living objections in compliance to the dead letter; (for objections they will have, and very strong ones too) such have, and will undoubtedly be shocked at this publication. Such may produce numerous texts in opposition to what is here produced; and can inspired writers be inconsistent with themselves? It is not at present necessary to discuss that question. Argue that point among yourselves; the printer will at least profit by your disputes; though you may happen to

— Explain a thing till all men doubt it,
And write about the subject, and about it;
So spins the silk-worm small its slender store,
And labours till it clouds itself all o'er.

This, yet, is none of his concern. The love of truth is a motive which ought to supersede every other consideration: for every other consideration is subordinate in comparison with it. Truth requires no tenderness of investigation, and scorns all subterfuges. It is, when displayed,

— — — — — divinely bright,
One clear, unchang'd, and universal light.

To rescue truth, therefore, from obscurity and disguise, is the most rational way of giving

*Glory to God in the highest; and on earth, peace:
good-will toward men.*

* Query.

A

LETTER

TO THE

REV. DR. S. CHANDLER,

FROM THE

Writer of the History

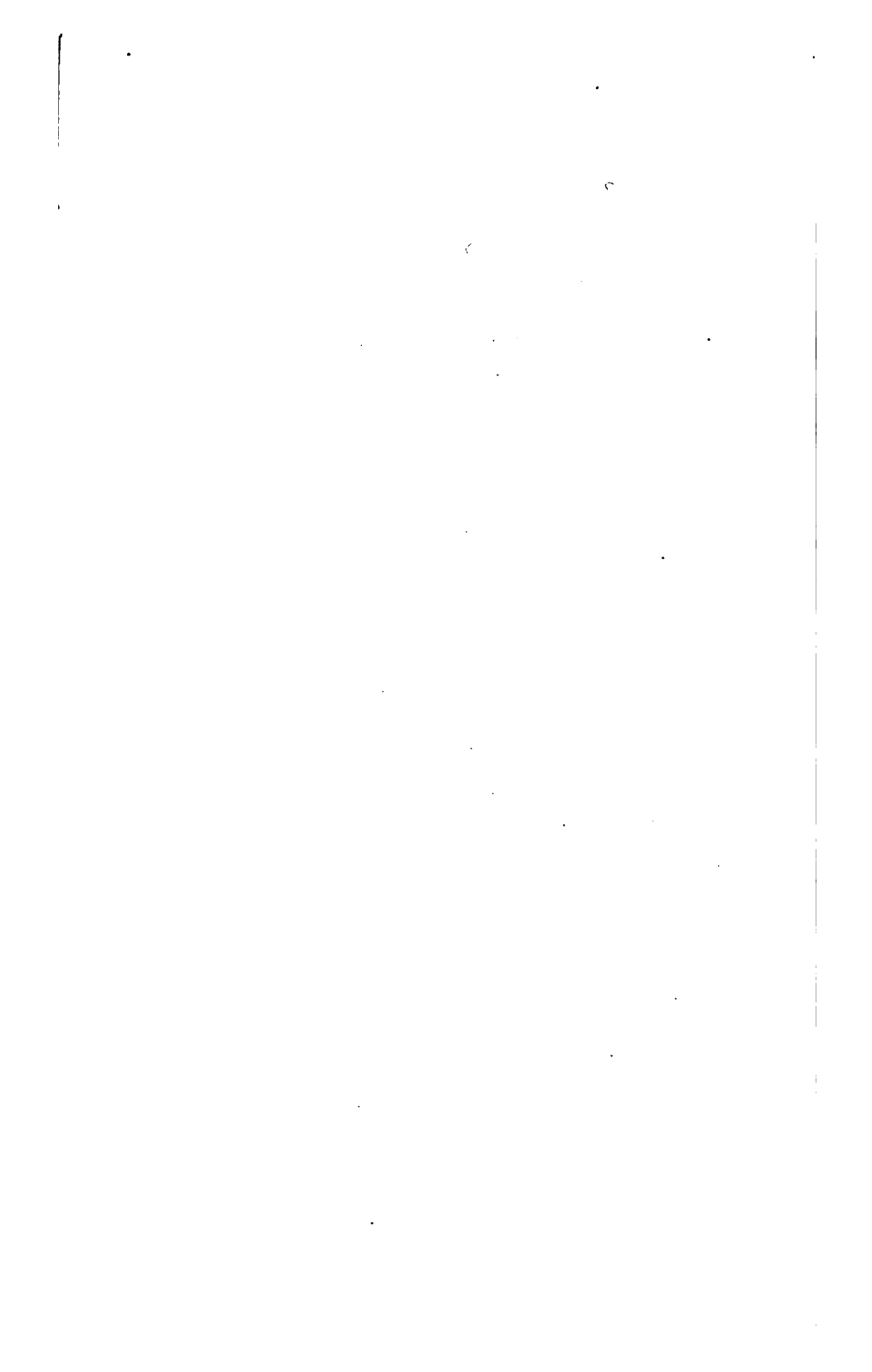
OF THE

MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART.

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1820.



DEDICATION

TO

THE FEMALES OF GREAT BRITAIN,

THE SUPPORTERS OF VIRTUE AND TRUTH.

LADIES,

I AM induced to dedicate this second volume of the Deist to you, in consequence of a large portion of it being a first translation from the celebrated Letters of the euridite Freret, addressed to a Lady of France, on the propriety of her renouncing the prevailing superstition, and the moral sufficiency of Deism to guide her in the paths of virtue. It too often happens, that the subjects on which the Philosopher has to treat, who is bold and honest enough to support the cause of truth, in an open avowal of infidelity to the divinity of the Christian Religion, are too indelicate for an open inscription to females, because, the general view of the origin of the Christian religion, agreeable to its own history, must be shewn to have its foundation in an act of incontinence, and because, the whole of those writings, which are called sacred, are replete with indecent and immoral tales, which, as a matter of jus-

tice, form for him a weapon of attack. The exposition of the controversy must consequently be debarred the public attention and patronage of the fair sex. I, for one, am sensible, that when they clearly see the real motive that stimulates the philosopher in the inculcation of Deism, in preference to Christianity, they will not only silently admire, but publicly applaud the measure. I am not aware, that the present volume contains a sentence which can give offence to the chastest mind that knows the general tenor of the books which form the Bible.

When the great influence is considered, which the virtuous part of your sex hold over society; when it is recollected that in your hands, and by your attentions, the minds of youth are formed; when it is known that you possess minds more susceptible and sensible of the fitness of first impressions, than the grosser minds of those, who arrogate to themselves the title of your Lords and Masters; when in spite of this presumptuous attempt to lessen your dignity and proper station in life, we find you virtuously obstinate to maintain, more by practice than in theory, a decided superiority; and when we feel that you are the poles of attraction, the directors, not only of fashions, but of manners, and the generous encouragers and supporters of the virtuous and the brave; it will be seen, that the ground of my anxiety to possess your patronage is not altogether importless, and I trust it will not be altogether unavailing.

The late groundless clamour about Atheism and Blasphemy must have left some impressions, from the

DEDICATION.

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quick sensations which ebb and flow in your minds, but I have no fear, that the calm dictates of justice, emanating from a cool and candid examination of the writings proscribed, and the conduct of the persons calumniated, will finally impress your bosoms with a love of unveiled truth, an admiration of its supporters, and a detestation of those, who seek to continue their ill-gotten gains, by the propagation of delusion and falshood. The love and sympathy of the virtuous female is the highest reward that merit, gallantry, valour, even intrepidity, can aspire to.

Excuse, Ladies, the presumption of one who addresses you whilst he is encircled with bolts, locks, bars, and strong walls; he wishes you to enquire carefully, what is the cause and what are the grounds sufficient to justify those who have thus immured him; not for himself, but that the expression of your voice and abhorrence of those attempts to stop the decay of superstition and bigotry, that your avowed sympathy and determination to cherish future sufferers in this cause, might operate to shame and silence the sceptered patron of hypocrisy, the mitred hypocrite, the crested supporter of ignorance, the learned in illusion, the surpliced preacher, and the bigotted protector of fanaticism and error, with its concomitants vice and immorality, and the whole breed of locusts, who devour the fruits of the poor man's labour, deprive him of the necessities of life, and insolently proclaim that the earth yieldeth for them alone, and that the plundered and starving labourer is an excrescence in society, a weed that should be rooted up and be no longer allowed to contaminate the

soil on which pampered vice claims superior right to tread.

With a sincere hope, Ladies, that instead of borrowing the fashions of dress from the females of Paris, you will seek rather to imbibe those sentiments which so extensively pervade the minds of the French Ladies: that you will participate in the philosophy of the age, assist in scattering the rays of truth, and that England may be graced with the superior beauty of your minds as well as your figures,

I subscribe myself

Your humble servant,

DORCHESTER GAOL,
MAY 14, 1820.

RICHARD CARLILE,

TO SUBSCRIBERS.

You will no doubt regret to hear the suspension of the publication of the *Deist* until the liberation of the Editor. The servility of Judges and special Juries, and the union of the bigot, fanatic, and hypocrite, with all those who fatten on the abuses of the English Government in Church and State, form so powerful a combination, that it cannot be expected that a female, with three infant children deprived of her husband and their father, can muster sufficient fortitude to brave the attacks of corruption united with hypocrisy, and resign herself as a victim to its vengeance and leave her children as orphans. It is therefore deemed prudent that Mrs. Carlile should compress her business and property as much as possible, that in case her, and the public's enemies, should pursue her to a dungeon, she might have the less to render her unhappy.

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A

LETTER

TO THE

REV. DR. SAMUEL CHANDLER.

SIR,

SOON after the appearance of the History of the Man after God's own Heart, a rumour spread abroad that you intended a reply to it. A circumstance for which the writer of it was far from being sorry ; as he concluded a defence of the character of King David from so confessedly able a hand, would greatly tend to illustrate the real merits or demerits of that celebrated monarch, whose life and actions have been the subjects of such variety of opposite constructions. Eager to learn what you, Sir, had to say, in opposition to what was advanced by him, he made frequent enquiry, as opportunity offered, when your answer was to appear. Nobody knew certainly ; but every one, acquainted with your former writings, ventured to predict the complexion of it : your friends were afraid that ' the Doctor would be too warm ;' while those, not so well affected perhaps to your side of the question, declared with less reserve, excuse the repetition, that ' come when it might, he would scold like a fishwoman.' The writer himself, not having read any of your former productions, except the sermon which gave rise to this controversy, was naturally led to conclude, that a Protestant Divine, long exercised in the profession of the gospel, must have profited so much by the meek spirit which it so manifestly inculcates, as to manage a

B

literary dispute especially, with distinguished moderation.

After near twelve months had elapsed, and expectation was tired out, gradual notices of its appearance transpired. First it was whispered that the Doctor, after submitting his performance to the correction of a friend, had very near wrote the whole anew : then it would come out speedily : and, after tracing it to one of its intended publishers, and two or three times being named, at length with due solemnity the bulky review issued forth.

It must be owned, that to the writer himself, whatever might have been the opinion of others, the external appearance of the little History, compared with the formidable size of your review of it, excited the recollection of the overgrown Goliath, clad in heavy armour, stalking forth with menacing steps to demolish the little David. It remains then to be tried whether the stripling can find a few smooth stones in his pouch, as well as a sling, wherewith to defend himself against this giant, who so proudly defies the armies of common sense.

It is a fortunate circumstance to write with the prejudices of mankind strongly interested in our favour. This, Sir, is doubly your fortune : first, with regard to the subject you have chosen ; secondly, with respect to your own established reputation. With these advantages, secure of welcome reception, well may the possessor advance with confidence : arguments, from his pen, are credited with double force ; specious ones are accepted as genuine ; assertion stands for proof ; declamation is mistaken for reasoning ; small errors are overlooked, and the most considerable ones excused. Belief is counted to him for righteousness ; and, like charity, is permitted to cover a multitude of sins.

Far different is the situation of the man, who is so deficient in prudence, as to call accepted notions in question ! the attempt is considered as impious ; and

and himself is hunted down like a wild beast, under the name of Infidel ! Thus it fared with the primitive Christians—thus it fared with the first reformers ; and even now, bating the faggot-stick, thus it fares with every one who presumes to differ in opinion from his neighbours in those points from which they say, thou shalt not differ. The arguments urged by such a one, are stiled wilful perversions—his proofs are manifestations of his ignorance—his mistakes are magnified beyond measure, and he is altogether, in mere Christian charity, held out to public detestation, as a monster in human form ! An old lanthorn is thus tied to a poor cur's tail, and he is turned out with hissing and clapping of hands ; *bow ! wow ! wow !* cry all the yelping pack, and it is by mere good luck alone, if he escapes with whole bones !

Had not this author met with treatment very unexpected in your animadversions on him, he would not again have set pen to paper on this subject. But a man must be a greater wretch than you have represented *him* to be, who, insensible to the opprobrium cast on him, can let you triumph with so high a hand, though with so questionable a pretension to victory.

The History of the Man after God's own Heart, was evidently a juvenile production ; the language of it would else have been more guarded, and not have lain open to so many extraordinary strictures, some of which shall be noticed anon : but now, Sir, that the writer of it is so fortunate as to possess the unlooked-for advantage of a thorough examen of it from your learned hand ; by which means every one will allow that he has gained the knowledge of the utmost extent of what criticism can object to it, from the fair and candid, even to that of Zoilus himself ; if ever, therefore, another edition of it appears, it shall certainly profit something from the acute notes you have bestowed upon it. And yet, methinks, the sanguine warmth of a young writer, who thought he perceived so clear a field before him, might have claimed some

good-natured toleration from one, who, though a distinguished veteran, either is, or ought to be, conscious that he has not outwrote the same fault himself.

Let us once more cast a look at the outsides of these adverse books, before we open them. What a disproportionate appearance! But if this writer hath put "forced constructions on particular passages; invidious insinuations, where there is nothing in the history to support them; improbable suggestions to eke out facts, or to supply the place of them; false assertions, contrary to the truth of history, to furnish matter for calumny and reviling; in a word, all methods contrary to truth and honour, and inconsistent with the rules of humanity, candour and justice." A heavy charge indeed! but if it is really the case, impositions so gross might surely have been exploded, to the utter confusion of this villifier, in far less compass. But, as if one instance more were wanting to confirm what was said in the preface to the *Life of David*, viz. "that the sense in which the acts of David are there understood is the most obvious and natural, appears from the amazing pains it has occasioned his champions to force another upon them." *Ecce signum!* Here is the little history, of the size of a snuff-box, price eighteen-pence; and, after near a year's time spent in an endeavour to invalidate it, here is a bulky octavo wrote against it, price four shillings! Go on, Doctor, and prosper; though indeed many people shake their heads at the price, while many more have declared that they would not accept four shillings to be obliged to read it. But the first of these do not consider that the historian being a vulgar illiterate fellow, who has given them nothing but plain English, might well afford his paltry work for eighteen-pence; but that the Review of him, which is enriched with so many Greek and Hebrew quotations, could not, in conscience, be charged less than four shillings: no, not a farthing less. The others do not reflect how much trouble it demands, and how much it will swell a work, to compare the

various readings of Scripture together; so that they may think it an extraordinary specimen of brevity to see it contained within such a moderate size.

The writer could not help smiling when he stated the case, that supposing his rejoinder were to exceed the quantity of your Review, only in arithmetical progression as much as your Review exceeds that of the History itself, what a size it would swell to! as large as Cruden's Concordance at least. But the misfortune would have been, that it must then have been published by subscription; and to whom could he apply, after the terrible picture you have drawn of him? He thinks he might have flattered himself, nevertheless, with the hopes of your name.

This, however, must really have been the case, had he adopted *your* plan of reviewing: had he, with unbating malignity, tortured every sentence you have penned; and torn your very words to rags. This was a necessity to which he did not imagine himself reduced; at the same time that he found no propensity to avail himself of resources which must be considered as rather illiberal. And though, God forgive him, he is conscious of too many imperfections to warrant boasting, he yet is too candid to return the compliment of imputing a black diabolism of heart to you, merely from a difference in opinion. With how ill a grace this comes from a preacher of the gospel of the meek and lowly Jesus, he leaves you to reflect on at leisure. But however flagrant and inconsistent it may be, he notwithstanding frees you from the charge of singularity: for, too true it is, that the fault is far from being particular. In all religious contests, the bitterness of resentment is ever on the orthodox side of the question. Gracious God! confirm to us a constitution of government which confines this bitterness within the bounds of expression only!

If some method be used in the debate concerning the moral character of David, the discussion of a few leading points will, in great measure, determine the

merits of all the rest ; therefore you must not expect to be analysed page after page, which would only lead to protraction and confusion. If the writer of the Life of David can justify himself from the principal objections brought against him, all the invidious declamatory deductions which give vent to your own resentment, and are calculated to inflame that of others, as well as to swell the four shillings book ; will, by the candid, be rated at just their real worth ; and be found to be *vox et pretereæ nihil* !

It may just be previously asked, respecting your charging the author with copying all his censures of David from Bayle and Morgan, because you possibly read much the same observations in those writers which you find in him : what, in the name of novelty, do you require ? Did you expect a different series of facts recorded by each ? The same course of events must always be perceivable in records of the same period, unless new ones are coined. In your own words you may be asked “ What novelty can there be in any true history ? ” Facts are indelible, and constructions on them, by people whose judgment is not warped by any previous bias, will not remarkably differ. This then may help you to account for the conformity you observe among these writers : and is explained to you, Sir, who, it is to be presumed from this censure, scorn to be beholden to any author who hath written on a subject before yourself.

Moreover, to be even with this writer, whom you archly suppose* to have been present at the covenant between David and his friend Jonathan, you have in turn taken upon you to be present at the writing of his history, and can point out† what he copied from Bayle, and what from Morgan ! Here, however, he begs leave to enter his caveat against you : since, though he does not expect to be credited by a man whose zeal hath eaten him up, he hopes the moderate part of mankind

* Review, p. 111.

† Ditto, preface, p. 36, 37.

will believe his solemn declaration, that he knows no more of Morgan than the name, and that he is said to be the writer of a work called the Moral Philosopher : which work, however, or any other work of his, he never read ; nor, knowingly, any quotation from : farther, that he entertained a dislike to the conduct of King David before he had an opportunity of seeing Bayle ; whose criticism, if the expression may be allowed, he in great measure anticipated. This, therefore, to him at least, is a pregnant specimen on what degree of evidence you will hazard an assertion !

The author's deficiency in a knowledge of the oriental languages, is a continual occasion of triumph to you ; since there are not many pages of your Review in which you do not reproach him with it, with visible exultation ; and, from this circumstance, deny him every other qualification whatever, excepting such as serve to render him odious ; and these, Sir, to do you justice, you bestow on him with a liberal hand, if not from a *liberal mind*. Suppose, however, this point were a little examined into, and enquiry were made how far you can really avail yourself of the writer's ignorance in this respect ? and yet it is rather cruel to attempt it, you convert the imputation to so many convenient purposes.

The writer, Sir, it seems, doth not understand Hebrew. Be it so. Let us observe of what this is productive. First, your own importance is amply gratified by looking down, like one of the giants in Guild-hall, upon him on that account : but unluckily to maintain this altitude, you are, in the second place, betrayed into the necessity of invalidating the authority of the English version of the Scriptures, which has cost the blood of so many martyrs to purchase, and which we Protestants have for so many years congratulated ourselves on the possession of ! Indeed, you are not very reserved on this point ; for though Mr. Bayle is under the same ban with the writer, you sneeringly

class Bayle with the English Bible:* and again, "Such a one, (as "the historian, ignorant of the language in which they are written,") when he goes beyond his translation, *or keeps to it*, must necessarily blunder, and expose himself to ridicule."† This is alarming news:—why, neighbours, we are all imposed on! and unless we understand Hebrew and Greek, the Scriptures, so far from making us wise unto salvation, will only lead us into error, and expose us to ridicule! Better, far better would it be for us to have them sealed up in the original languages, than to be deluded with a translation so baleful in its properties! To us English readers, the advice of the Evangelist carries all the force of a taunt or sneer; "Search the Scriptures, for in them YE THINK ye have eternal life:‡ Yes, yes, we think so; but it seems if we trust to them, we must necessarily blunder, and expose ourselves to ridicule!

It happens, however, rather unfortunately, Sir, that the respectable contemplators of Hebrew tenter-hooks, are as much at a loss about the precise meaning of *them*, as we little pigmies are about the consistency of our despised English translation. Pray, Doctor, are you an Hutchinsonian, or are you not? Are they not continually wrangling even about the use and meaning of *points*? Surely these learned Doctors ought, in justification of their own importance, first to agree among themselves concerning the original, before they knit their awful brows, and cry, "Stand by thyself, come not near to us, for we are more learned than thou." Original! what original? It would be worth the knowledge, Doctor, to learn from which, among the great number of Hebrew originals, whose considerable variations the learned, among whom you, Sir, are to be numbered, have so plentifully enabled Dr. Kenicot to collate, you draw your authorities? and the reasons for preferring your own readings?

* Preface, p. 34.

† Ditto, p. 38.

‡ John v. 39.

Until some satisfaction be offered respecting these points, until some agreement appears between the Hutchinsonians and other Hebrew expositors, it is hoped some degree of credit will be granted to that translation, on which we are allowed to form our religious principles, though not to criticise from.

You say, Sir,* "A candid critic will make some allowances both for defects and redundances in books of that great antiquity, which the Old Testament books confessedly are." True, Sir, if the Old Testament books, like other books, are left to rest upon the allowances of candid criticism: if they are not obtruded upon us with any claim or authority to influence our estimation of them, superior to those of other writings; but you, Sir, set them above such allowances, affirming† that you consider David "as revelation represents him." What! do we need revelation to record matters of fact? Pray are all the variations of the Hebrew copies revelation? When this plea is waved, we will then do the best we can with these ancient writings. As is it is, we have only to examine into the congruity of them.

The historian had advanced in his preface,‡ "that lest it should be imagined too great liberties are taken with the biblical writers, it may not be amiss to mention once for all, that innumerable instances might be produced to shew that the authority of the Lord, so continually quoted to sanctify every transaction related, constituted for the most part nothing more than national phrases, which obtained universally § among so bigotted a people as on all occasions the Jews appear to have been."

* Page 284. † Preface, p. 8. ‡ Page 12.

§ Their priests, judges, and prophets, ruled them in the name of the Lord; and the people so taught, acquired a like style of discourse. During the civil wars, in the reign of Charles I. and the usurped protectorate of Oliver Cromwell, a phraseology, in some degree similar, obtained in England: how far justifiable, must be left to the learned.

The only portion of your observations on this passage, which it will answer any purpose to attend to, is comprehended in the ensuing extract.*

"Now if our historian, or somebody else for him, can, as he boasts, produce innumerable instances to shew that the authority of the Lord constituted, for the most part, nothing more than national phrases, it becomes him to do it in his own vindication; for unless he can fairly support this assertion, great part of his history will appear to be falsehood and fiction, and his criticism nothing but the effect of ignorance and infidelity."

He subscribes to the alternative.

Before these proofs are hinted at, it may not be amiss to consider another passage, *en passant*, that we may make clear way as we proceed.

You strangely assert, Sir, that † "It is to no purpose to allege, that what was pretended to be spoken—in the name of the Lord, was unworthy him to deliver, and therefore could not be spoken or delivered in command by him. This is foreign to the argument. The sole question is about the meaning of the expressions in which the authority of the Lord is quoted; whether they signify any thing or nothing; or whether they who used them, and heard them, did consider them as declarative of the Divine authority or not."

These positions are very strange indeed, considering the character of the person who advances them. You demand the solution of a question, having previously barred the only means of investigation! What is the alternative here? a Romish principle it is to be feared. We are to believe whatever is proposed to our belief! for it is to no purpose to examine into the worth of it! The conditions of *your* question reduce the reply to a mere affirmation or negation; possibly not without design: but if we are to found our belief on the rational evidence of any point offered to our assent, it

* Preface, p. 32.

† Ditto, p. 33.

is certainly our business to examine into *possibility*, *propriety*, and *fitness*. Unless, therefore, you had laid down a rule for assenting and dissenting without reflection, the intended method of arguing must be pursued.

If Britain be really that free country we are continually flattering ourselves that it is, and which for the honour of the reformed religion it may be hoped to be, no person will run any hazard in expressing his opinion of any doctrinal point; more especially when he at the same time exhibits the authorities on which he founds his judgment: if they are valid, his tenets, however heterodoxical they may be deemed, are nevertheless just: if not, the advancer will meet that disregard, which is all the punishment he ought to incur.

As there does not appear to be the *least reason* to honour any man more than he *intrinsically* merits; and as examining the life of David is examining a *piece of history*; it is but exercising a liberty which no just reason can controul, from any regard to relative circumstances, or points of doctrine: it is therefore hoped, that the real life of David, being as to the main points what is here represented, may plead this writer's excuse for the freedom with which he has expressed his opinion of it: still professing, that wherever this appears to have been indulged with too much confidence, shall be restrained as future occasions may allow opportunity.

Now, Sir, though the writer is no great friend to subscriptions to articles of faith, yet he thinks it necessary in this place to present you with what perhaps you may consider as a curiosity; to wit, a piece of his creed! and which he humbly presumes to be a piece of your's also: as a touchstone to try whatever is affirmed concerning the Almighty! But at the same time, fearful of expressing it in his own words, from the experience of your dexterity in word-catching, he will endeavour to find some passages in Scripture suit-

able to his notions of the eternal perfections of the Supreme God ! still however, apprehensive, lest by the help of the Hebrew, Chaldaic, Arabic, and Samaritan versions, with the assistance of the Greek Septuagint, you may explain away and confound every passage produced from the English translation. This being in your power to attempt or not, as inclination prompts, he must trust to.

You have passed a censure on those who quote passages from authors by halves,* with a view to perversion ; this is very wrong, by whosoever practised, but will be avoided here, as complete sentences only will be extracted, and when placed together, their agreement or disagreement will be obvious. One word more, however, on this head ; it is not so unfrequent to find religious writers take three words from one part of the Bible, two from another, four from another, and thus splice sentences together, which will prove a point of doctrine as clear as the sun at noon day !

With reverence, would the author produce and subscribe his assent to the ensuing propositions ! which are numbered for future reference.

PROP. 1.—“ The Heavens declare the glory of God : and the firmament sheweth his handy work.” Psalm xix. 1.

PROP. 2.—“ The works of his hands are verity and judgment : and his commandments are sure. They stand fast for ever and ever : and are done in truth and uprightness.” Psalm cxi. 7, 8.

PROP. 3.—“ The Lord is good to ALL : and his tender mercies are over ALL his works.” Psalm cxlv. 9.

PROP. 4.—“ Of a truth—God is no respecter of persons ; but IN EVERY NATION, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.” Acts x. 34, 35.

This, Sir, is Scripture, and reason also ! and gives us in few words the most exalted notions of the great God of the Universe ! It is impossible, therefore, to withstand the force with which they dart irresistible conviction into a rational mind.

From these propositions another is deducible, equally valid and incontestible.

PROP. 5.—All affirmations which represent Deity as actuated by the passions, or subject to the weaknesses of humanity, are totally inconsistent with the foregoing positions ; are derogatory from his perfections ; and evidently point out man as their author.

What an extensive view does this open for speculation ! Suffice it, however, to confine our attention to the present object of debate.

That the Lord should be offended at the Jews complaining of oppressive government and corrupt administration ; that he should interpret a desire to change the administrators, into a renunciation of his Divine Providence ; that he should give them a king in his *anger*, and *afterward*, *finding* he did not prove obedient, should *repent* of it ; then take him away in his *wrath* ; that he should, however, at length *reconcile* himself to the measure ; then chuse them a king after his own heart, and establish the kingdom in his house : if these points should appear difficult to reconcile with the foregoing scriptural propositions : in that case,

These representations of Samuel are rather to be esteemed as dictated only by his chagrin : and though at the same time he preserved a great shew of regard for the welfare of the people, this is quite consonant with that external placidity and moderation with which persons in public stations, desirous to retain their power, often find it expedient to clothe their inward sentiments. The writer, indeed, incurs your censure, by saying, he promised “ them a king with vengeance to them : ” but pray, Doctor, how do you interpret his display of kingly government ? He certainly intended to frighten them out of their scheme ; but the people who, when they pleased, knew how to be obstinate,

were not so easily talked out of their project: and though their naturally enthusiastic dispositions sometimes caused strange transitions in their conduct, they did not at this time enter into the propriety of the Lord's interesting himself in the behalf of two corrupt magistrates.

You were guilty of a small mistake* yourself, in asserting that the incursion of Nahash occasioned the first demand of a king; Saul being already elected at that time, and the very commander who delivered his people from the ignominious terms insisted on by the Ammonite king.

You, Sir, deliver it as your opinion,† that “in reality the demand of the people was insolent and treasonable; as it was throwing off the immediate government of God, and as it expressed a desire of being like other nations; which of all things in the world they should have avoided,‡ and which was the cause of their final ruin.” What! was it insolent to complain of oppression? Was it treasonable in the people to chuse their form of government? All government ought to spring from the choice of the people; and when the circumstances of times demand and allow it, it is undoubtedly right to claim it; even though they should mistake the means to obtain their end. As to their rejection of the superintendence of God over their affairs, it does not appear in this instance; and as to the cause of their ruin, what you so boldly assign for it, seems rather premature.

Some curious criticisms of your's in this place, are deemed undeserving notice; but those who are desirous of seeing a specimen of your talents that way, may be amply gratified in their desire, and meet with no small amusement into the bargain, in pages 11 and 12 of your Review. There, Doctor, they may find

* Preface, p. 8.

† Page 10.

‡ And yet Providence had an *end* in the appointment of David to be king, viz. ‘that God by him might accomplish the antient promise made to Abraham, in their full extent.’ Page 86.

you very busy in small craft, which no gentleman could be thought capable of descending to, and for which no plea can be offered but the sad one of your needing every little artifice to support your opposition; and a confidence that they might pass with the unthinking majority as mighty clever and dextrous.— ‘ Ah! Doctor, there you have him charmingly! Oh! what a fine thing it is to be high learned!’

But to leave cavilling at words, and attend to things; you allege, from Josephus, that “ the solicitude of Saul and his servant, to make a present to Samuel, proceeded from their ignorance.”* But, Sir, this is a very weak supposition: for ignorance could not have dictated such a measure without precedent. It is therefore, a fair conclusion that private intelligence not only used† to be given, but be paid for.‡ You say§ —“ But doth not the whole tenor of Samuel’s conduct manifest, as our author affirms, that he intended to give them a king in name, but to have one subordinate to his own will? I think not; because his allowing the people a free, impartial, and open election by lot, is one demonstration that he intended they should have a king to their own mind, and who should be subordinate to none, but that God, who was the supreme king of the nation, and by whose will the king they chose ought to be determined.”

If their king was to be subordinate to God, and to be determined by his will, it would be curious to know how this people had rejected God, by demanding a king! Again, if it was a free election by lot, it might be a *method* according to their own mind, of choosing a king; but certainly could not secure the fixing on a *king* to their own mind! as you, Sir, affirm. Once more; with regard to the freedom and impartiality of the election; you do not deny, Sir, that the king hereafter to be chosen, was previously pointed out, and allotted to this exaltation: now without entering at this time into a dispute whether the choice was made

by God or man, yet the previous election being a fact, the popular election was intentionally managed to confirm the other: and whether over-ruled by God or by Samuel, how could it in either case be really a free and impartial election? The author, therefore, begs you would graciously be pleased to give him back the word *apparently* again; as he has still some use for it; however inaccurately it might be placed before. The means by which the lot was guided to Saul, are referred back to you to determine.

Though Saul was a king given to the Jews in anger, yet, as you observe, he was intended to be obedient to the commands of the Lord, as delivered to him by Samuel; but it seems he was not obedient! but gave "a strong specimen of that obstinate, rash, and impetuous temper, that made him unfit for the government he was raised to, and which was the true reason of his being rejected by God.*. But was it not, however, a stronger reason against his being chosen by infinite wisdom? Will you, Sir, venture to say that the Lord was mistaken? indeed, Scripture† intimates something like it; but is it not more consistent with the 2d and 4th scriptural Proposition,‡ to attribute the anger, the choice, the disappointment, the repentance and rejection, to Samuel, agreeable to Prop. 5.§

It is not incumbent on the author to account entirely for the motives of Samuel's choice of Saul in the circumstances wherein he found him; though were it material, very probable suggestions might be offered on this head.

Joy to you, Doctor, on your conceit|| of the ass-shepherd! It is true he is quite a new created animal, yet—here the author was almost tempted to retort a joke on you, but no good end results from them, and other work is at hand.

* Review, p. 26.—It is to be noted, however, that in the affair of the sacrifice, he tarried "according to the set time that Samuel had appointed." 1 Sam. xiii. 8.

† 1 Sam. xv 10, 11. ‡ Page 20. § Page 21. || Review, p. 30.

You would not allow the writer, Sir, to say that the authority of the Lord was customarily quoted among the Jews; and yet yourself do not seem to have attained a precise meaning of one of these phrases; for when the spirit of the Lord is said to have come upon Saul* you expound it to be a temporary prophetic inspiration; yet, when the spirit of the Lord is said to depart from him, behold it has a different meaning quite †. You then ask 'what spirit? not the prophetic spirit, which he received according to Samuel's prediction; which ceased instantly when his prophesying was ended: not the spirit to render him incapable of transgressing; for that he never had, and therefore could never lose it.—No. "The spirit of the Lord departed from him," i. e. God was no longer with him to prosper and guide him; ‡ but left him, as the effect of his disobedience, to that evil, melancholy, jealous, envious, malicious, murderous spirit; that afterward possessed him, and seems never wholly to have left him.' So convenient is it to maintain a latitude of interpretation to serve an argument at a pinch. A latitude, Sir, that you exercise very freely in the course of this laboured work. But the author's observation respecting Saul, remains still in full force: for, when Saul left Samuel after his private inauguration, and the scripture relates what befel him; the narrative commences thus: "And it was so, that when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart;"§ in consequence of the promise that he should *be turned into another man*.|| A person would conclude from the premises, that this new heart given him by the Lord would have been a good one, and an extraordinary good one; and yet Saul transgressed in the estimation of Samuel nevertheless! the prophetic inspiration was moreover, and is sepa-

* Page 54, 55.

† Page 55.

‡ Yet your immediately preceding words affirm him never to have had that spirit of guidance!

§ 1 Sam. x. 9.

|| Ver. 6.

- rately mentioned ; both in the promise and in the relation of its completion. And yet again, if the spirit of the Lord is interpreted by prophecy ; when David was anointed, the spirit of the Lord is said to have come upon David *from that day forward* :* and the spirit of the Lord to depart from Saul.† But his prophetic powers *did not* depart from him ! since he is reported to have prophesied twice afterward :‡ and at the last time, Sir, you give it as your opinion, § that what he prophesied “ was somewhat certainly worthy of the spirit of God, which came upon him.” All this compared together, appears as odd to the full, as the historian’s observation !

- Poor Saul ! what an infernal being art thou represented ! thou art even reviled worse than Shimei reviled the instrument of thy misfortunes ! But, it was thy fate to offend those who never forgive ; || hence came thy distresses when alive, and thy magnified crimes when dead !

It is true, Sir, that the historian has ventured to hint at motives for some of Saul’s actions, which are attributed to inconsistency ; but he is always considered as a *Hebrew* : and when you cite the expression, that his character doth not appear to be stained with any conspicuous fault ; and ring your changes upon it ; you were not generous enough to prefix what is connected with it, viz. ‘ allowing for the *peculiar complexion* of the people over whom he was placed’—this includes a meaning not altogether for your purpose : but who quotes writers by halves now, Doctor ? ¶

“ The excision of the Amalekites,’ you say,** had been determined, and ordered by God, above four hundred years before the time we are now speaking of, upon their ungenerously, and without any cause, attacking the Hebrews at Rephidim.’ It was ex-

* 1 Sam. xvi. 13. † Ver. 14. ‡ Chap. xviii. 10. xix. 24. § Page 66. || Prophets and Priests. ¶ See Review, preface, p. 27.

** Pages 56. 153.

trepreneur natural for these nations to oppose the passage of an emigrant people marching with professed intentions to dispossess them of their habitations, property, and lives. Their continual enmity to the Jews,* is deducible from the same source.

But you plead the wickedness of these nations as an argument for their destruction; pray were not the Hebrews continually reproached with their wickedness and rebellion? and any other plea for peculiar privileges, than that of peculiar excellence, will not agree with Prop. 6. This, however, is rather a deviation; let us return.

Saul's crime included not only his preserving king Agag, but also the best of the cattle! Pray, Sir, do tell us for what crimes the cattle were proscribed? Saul, in this reservation, acted but according to the usual practice in the Jewish wars, which was to save all that was good, and appropriate it to their own emolument.

Having, however, stated the case, that the writer aimed to establish the character of Saul, as that of the hero of his piece; it was easy to play off all your small artillery against the scheme: it is pretty amusement; therefore, while you are thus diverting yourself, other points may be considered.

It is a most extraordinary prohibition that you will not allow *God's own heart* to be the height of purity by supposition! you ask† 'by whose supposition?' and answer, 'by no man's living, but one who is blessed with our author's ignorance and presumption.' This blessing, Sir, is all your own. It is, however, an ignorant presumption, of which he will never have cause to be ashamed, either here or hereafter. But he has the presumption, Sir, to tell you, that if you are able to construe your mother tongue, you are guilty of wilful perversion in *your* exposition of this supposition; as well as in another instance, where you charge the author with saying, that the intestine

commotions in Judea, occasioned by the revolts of Absalom and Sheba, continued three years :* neither of which feats will reflect much honour on you.

It is not worth while to analyse them, they are referred to, and that school-boy ought to be flogged, who, having read the passages in question, could not detect your exposition of them. The phrase—Man after God's own heart, was never understood by the writer as attributing positive perfection to David ; but as expressive of a high relative encomium on his character.

Your limitation of this expression to a religious sense, independent of a moral reference, is a restriction not allowable : since piety toward God is inconsistent with turpitude of manners. You have, indeed, cited several passages to evince that this phrase implied a readiness to fulfil the commands of the Lord ; and what then ? is an obedience to the occasional commands of God, consistent with a disregard of his permanent moral injunctions ? You have indeed said,† “ The particular purposes for which God raised him (David) to the throne, were that, by his steady adherence to the one true God, and the religion that was established by Moses, he might be an illustrious example to all his posterity, that should reign after him ; ”—and you have also added,‡ ‘ If, therefore, David's moral character was worse than it will ever be proved to be, he might be a man after God's own heart, in the proper original sense of the expression ; and our author's treatise is an impertinent attempt to prove David not to be what the sacred history never asserted him to be.’ How much more impertinent then is your treatise, in which you labour to make him to be, what you own ‘ the sacred history never asserted him to be.’

You may, perhaps, be sincere in your opinion, but many of your readers will hardly think a pious character vested with such great latitudes of moral excep-

* Preface, page 26. Review, p. 217. † Page 88. ‡ Page 89, 103.

tions. But it was a necessary point to establish, it being all the foundation you had on which to erect your building: but credit a friend, Doctor, who assures you it is a sandy one.

As our moral obligations arise from our social connexions, and our welfare depends on the conservation of them, it is possible for a person to be virtuous who may yet have no religion; but a person *cannot* be religious to the exclusion of morality. David, therefore, to be a man after God's own heart, ought to have been of exemplary morals.

Not to mention that, if Infinite Wisdom makes a choice, and the chosen person acts by express warrant from God, something more than common knowledge and virtue is naturally expected, to evidence the fact.

In your account of David's introduction to the court of Saul,* you affect to laugh at the hint of a concerted plan for producing him. Concerning this, it need only be said that, like Saul, his destination to the kingdom was previous to the public steps taken for his advancement to it; and where history fails, conjecture steps in, and ought to be, as it is in this instance, on the side of probability.

You have also produced some Hebrew† words to prove that you do not know what is meant by David's being made armour-bearer to Saul; but as it appears to be a military appointment, distinct from his musical capacity, the wonder still remains concerning his dismission:‡ and more especially since Saul was not thoroughly cured of the hyp. This leads to a still farther wonder at Saul's ignorance of David, when he encountered the Philistine giant; as the interval of

* Page 89.

† Page 95, note.

‡ You suppose, p. 96, that his absence from Saul must have been for a considerable time, perhaps a year or two. But by the marginal chronology to the Bible, it appears that the time from the first anointing of David, to Jonathan's expostulation with his father on his antipathy to him, was included within the compass of a single year.

time between his dismissal and the combat, could not be considerable, since the day after the combat, David harped before the king,* “as at other times.”

So far from commending Saul for the price he asked for his daughter, after David appears to have won her,† it seems a demand very ridiculously expressed. It must have been a glorious sight to have seen David bring the foreskins to king Saul, strung perhaps on a piece of pack-thread, and dangling in his hand, or thrown across his shoulders like a sash! and if Miss Michal was present, how her pretty little heart must exult when the required number being told off, as many more were gallantly presented at her feet!

With regard to the affection between David and Jonathan, David’s expression of it is uncommonly strong‡ in his lamentation for him. But if, as you say,§ “Jonathan ever considers David as an innocent person, and pleads for him to his father, not as for a rebel, or notorious offender, to obtain his pardon; but as having never done any thing to forfeit Saul’s favour, or his own life;” yet beside this affection, Jonathan, it is possible, really thought David appointed to the kingdom, by Divine commission, which Saul, in his reasonable hours, does not seem to have done; and which no doubt was esteemed one of the symptoms of his madness: and his uneasy reflections on all the circumstances of the pretension considered together, very possibly disordered him enough to countenance the imputation.

On the whole, he appears to have been strangely irresolute and inconsistent with himself; and is perhaps represented more so than he might really have been: but the undertaking to render himself independent was too arduous for one in his situation; therefore his actions and professions might sometimes disagree. Indeed, after all, whether we attribute any thing to par-

* 1 Sam. xviii. 10.

‡ 2 Sam. i. 26.

† 1 Sam. xvii. 25 27.

§ Page 107.

tial representation or not, the Scripture history, in the form we now see it, is not well put together: we shall see how it will read when the expected collations are made. It is impossible to argue from every expression that may be produced; we must form our judgment from leading events, and corresponding expressions; and determine as they tally with probability. If Saul himself, however he is represented as subscribing to it, was really assured of David's destination to supersede him by Divine decree, there was nothing left for him but resignation: Can man fight against God? since therefore his continual aim was to destroy David, it argues against this assurance: and if Saul himself was mad, surely his soldiers were not; and how came he to find his army as mad as himself,* to persecute the Lord's anointed?

It was thought that Saul's massacre of the priests at Nob had been sufficiently censured, when his resentment was declared to have 'exceeded not only the bounds of humanity, but also of good policy.' But that this resentment was causeless, does not follow from any thing you have urged.† It was indeed a barbarous action; but humanity must not be understood as an impediment in human politics: and were we to start at every massacre that occurs in the Jewish history, the pen must be employed in little else than notes of exclamation!

You will not allow‡ that when David retired from Judea to Achish king of Gath, the first time; he intended to enter into a treaty of alliance with him against the Hebrews; than which nothing can be more evident. You ask, "had he any quarrel with

* You say David's claim was universally known, page 164.

† In so small a territory as Judea, the difference between the king and his son-in-law, so popular a man, could not be unknown to persons in any measure removed from the vulgar. Therefore Abimelech and your interpretation of his defence, are not to be implicitly credited.

‡ Page 115.

them?' No! he had not, but he had with their king. Again you ask,* 'would not such an alliance with the Philistine prince against them, have been a sure means of cutting off every expectation of ever coming at the Hebrew throne!' No! it *did not*, which is still more. You may perhaps reply, that he *did not* enter into a treaty with him, especially against the Hebrews. It is true we have no treaty handed down to us, neither perhaps did they sign and seal: but he afterward did enter into such a connexion with this Philistine prince as his situation warranted, he asked refuge with him, obtained it, and acknowledged the obligation by a present out of his plunder; he promised his assistance to him against the Hebrews, and yet came to be king of Judea nevertheless! So that you gain little by this question.

In your remarks on David's collecting partisans at Adullam, you produce some Hebrew and Greek,† to shew that you knew how *men in difficulties*, and *bitter of spirits*, were expressed in those languages; which really is all the purpose your quotations appear to serve: and having affirmed these difficulties to be such, 'that the most worthy men *may* be in,' we are left to infer the *ergo*, that these adherents to David were the most worthy of men. But without contesting the private merit of these worthy men, it may just be hinted that *distress*, *debt*, and *discontent* against the government in being, are the most favourable circumstances to give birth to sedition. Such were the situations of the men who resorted to David, *and he became a captain over them*. You look upon David as only solicitous for his personal safety; but by what inducements did these men resort to him? it should seem that they had all disquiets enough of their own, why should they all quit their own concerns, and unite to protect him? If he was "the well-known successor‡ to the crown," and Saul a mad tyant, it would

* Page 116.

† Page 117.

‡ Page 118.

have been more in character had the powerful and respectable part of the people patronized this persecuted youth against his impious oppressor ; he would thus have appeared respectable himself. But without this sanction, what could he do to render himself of consequence ? why he allured men desperate in their circumstances to embark in his projects ; and aided the alleged purpose of Divine will, by an arm of flesh.

You indeed, Sir assert* that ‘ we read nothing of their plundering and murdering others :’ an assertion which is rather premature ! their ‘ good discipline and order’ will not prove it ; and employment in ‘ services of a friendly and beneficent nature,’ did not enable these distressed men to make presents to king Achish !

Their pretensions to the sovereignty over Judea, being derivable from the same authority ; you argue† that ‘ it was equal rebellion in Saul to oppose David, as in David to oppose Saul : and David had as good a right to dispute the title of Saul and his family, as Saul had to dispute his.’ Possibly he might, Doctor, had they started fair. But the appointment of Saul had already taken place, and had received a popular confirmation : David disturbed a quiet government, and therefore it must be by some new discovered rule in logic that he ‘ is at once exculpated from all rebellion against Saul :’ and not—‘ by the doctrine of our biographer.’

You prove the innocence of David against the charge of intending to contest the kingdom, from the professions of himself, of Jonathan, and of Saul : none of which will be admitted as valid evidence, for some reasons before mentioned. You own‡ at the same time, ‘ there were in those days evil-minded persons as well as in ours, who insinuated that David was a rebel, and had a design on Saul’s life.’ Evil-minded to be sure they must be to insinuate any such thing ; but unless they were arrant fools, as well as evil-mind-

* Page 118.

† Page 121.

‡ Page 123

ed, we must take it for granted their insinuations were deduced from circumstances which rendered them probable: many of which we may suppose not to have reached our times ; so that the melancholy disorder of Saul was not without external causes, to excite the evil spirit within him.

David rescued Keilah from the philistine invaders : this exploit, you think,* ' might have drawn one word of commendation from this very candid historian.' It shall have all the commendation to which it is entitled, from *your own* representation of the action ; and what can be fairer ?

Dissatisfied with the writer's saying that David hoped to make it a garrison for himself, you add,† ' I believe David was in hopes to have dwelt in safety there, after the deliverance he had obtained for the citizens, as he had thereby purchased their friendship and protection. But he could not hope to make it a garrison, because he knew he had not men enough for that purpose, as appears from his conduct ; because when he had sure information of the treachery they intended him, he abandoned the city, as not able to curb the inhabitants, and retired to the wilderness.'

This passage alone is amply sufficient to confirm the reality of David's rebellious intentions : it is therefore worth analysing. That he delivered this city from the depredations of the Philistines is granted ; that he by this action thought to purchase the friendship of the inhabitants, you acknowledge ; the use he intended to convert this friendship to, is the point to be ascertained. Saul was advancing to suppress him. You Sir, say, that he hoped to have dwelt in safety at Keilah : but that, not having men sufficient to awe the inhabitants, their concurrence was necessary. Had he seduced them from their allegiance, and obtained the expected protection, he would have deprived Saul of this city ; which city the author humbly imagined

might have been considered as a garrison. You will undoubtedly again urge the old plea of his providing only for his personal safety, against his malignant persecutor. But, Sir, his intended retention of a city to secure that safety, was a flagrant rebellious intention. Had he gained this one city, as his strength increased, he would have concluded as many more as he could have procured, necessary for his preservation; until he had monopolized the whole country, agreeable to the grant of Samuel, which would then have justified the usurpation. But balked in the first step by the loyalty, miscalled treachery, of the Keilites, he evacuated the town, having lost the recompense of his labour, and with his men *went whithersoever they could go*.*

Not to insist on the hint that the invasion of the Philistines just after the raising the siege of Keilah was of David's procuring; the supposition is not of that marvellous nature in which you triumphantly represent it†. For though David had just done them an ill turn, yet his aim in it being disappointed, and himself destitute of any place of security for a retreat; by what rule in politics will you deny, that David thus circumstanced between two enemies, might negotiate a pacification to draw off one of them? and this supposition is far from being discredited, by considering that when David found he could not maintain any footing in Judea, the next step of importance taken by him, was to retire among those very Philistines.

First, however, happened the adventures at Engedi and Maon. On what account Saul entered the cave‡ is not worth much Hebrew: your exposition may stand undisturbed by the writer, if you think the discourse

* 1 Sam. xxiii. 13.

† Page 127.

‡ It is impossible to pass your judicious note on the word *uncover*, p. 128. without doing honour to your abilities! where you will not permit *uncover* to signify an act opposed to that of *cover*!—'because uncovering my feet signifies pulling off my shoes and stockings; therefore, putting them on signifies going to bed.'—Pray, Doctor, put them on and go to bed; the sooner the better.

between David and his men in so quiet a recess, and the cutting off a piece of Saul's robe, (hardly performed with the neatness of a taylor's shears) might not disturb a man with all his senses awake. To invalidate the motive alleged by the writer for David's not killing Saul, founded on the unlikelihood of the Jews accepting for their king a man who should embrue his hands in the blood of the Lord's anointed, you reply*, 'But surely if this be a good reason, it will hold as strongly against his rebelling against Saul, and by force of arms disputing the crown with him; for what reasonable hopes could he entertain, that the Jews would receive for their king, a man who should dare to rise up in rebellion against the Lord's anointed, and with a company of banditti and ruffians, by disputing the crown with him, endeavour to snatch it impiously from his head? Especially as a rebellion against a prince is an actual attempt upon his life, and when successful, generally issues in his destruction.' There is one consideration which will obviate this plea, which is, that though successful rebellion, which then changes its name, generally terminates in the destruction of the vanquished; yet that destruction is greatly altered in appearance, when a prince falls in the common distresses of open warfare, and when by private assassination. This, Sir, you insist on, in a notable manner, in the case of Uriah.†

There may be yet another motive hinted for his not killing Saul. You will not allow‡ the supposition that Saul strayed far from his men when he entered the cave: think then, Sir, what chance for escape David and his small corps would have had, if Saul had been missing! if he had been observed to enter the cave without coming out again! and if upon search he had been there found murdered!

David's mercy to Saul is therefore to be naturally accounted for, without contradicting the Scriptures§.

* Page 131. † Page 210. ‡ Page 135.
§ 1 Sam. xv. 26. 28. xvi. 1

by asserting, 'that he was anointed not to supersede him while living, but to succeed him after his death;' or in plain facts either, by saying, that he was 'determined to wait that event, in the course of providence, and not to hasten it by any act of his own.' Let circumstances decide this point.

The personal character of Nabal, considering the affair of his return to David's demands, as delivered down to us; is hardly more material, than the motive for which Saul retired into the cave: not to be an implicit admirer of this adventurer, is sufficient even at this day to stamp infamy on a person's character. He had preserved his possessions without *a wall* hitherto; and did not conceive himself under such obligations to David as he was represented to be: with the bluntness of a rustic he spoke his sentiments without reserve, which excited a resentment suitable to the character Nabal viewed him in. Like Saul, Nabal must no doubt be a madman, to differ with David; but your inferring a brutality in his conduct more than appears, or is probable; arguing from the degree of David's resentment*, is rather weak than acute.

It would be doing great service to David's character if you could prove any possible behaviour of Nabal, sufficient to justify such savage intention, especially from a person peculiarly pious. But as you own † David's resolution '*by no means* to be vindicated,' why do you use any means for that purpose?

The fair Abigail averted the execrable deed! The acknowledged ‡ defects and redundancies in the old Testament books, render it impossible for you, Sir, or any one else, to say absolutely what did, or did not pass at this meeting. Thus much we know; that the lady was beautiful, the soldier young, and very susceptible of amorous impressions; that she obtained her suit, but that her husband, instead of rejoicing at his deliverance, and approving his wife's conduct, broke

* Page 139.

† Page 141.

‡ Page 234.

his heart on the occasion; and to close the story, that David immediately took her to wife; and not only her, but another also. Continency was not his virtue.

These circumstances are thought to justify the reflections they excited: and moreover, that if they had occurred in any other history, you, Sir, would have drawn conclusions not much different. Indeed, you must pardon the writer, who while he considers you as under the necessity of justifying many transactions, yet imagines you may sometimes secretly wish they had been otherwise than they are.

The peculiar elegance, purity, and precise difference of accepting *faces*, instead of *persons*: does not appear, for want of your having been more explicit. Though *faces* may be a more literal translation of your Hebrew, yet *person* seems more intelligible and agreeable to the meaning of the present passage. Why you recommend these favourite *faces* to the writer's remembrance as long as he lives*, is another hint too learnedly obscure for him to receive the benefit intended by it.

You produce next, Sir, what you call reasons†, to disprove the supposition that the two instances of David's sparing the life of Saul, were but different relations of the same fact. These reasons might have passed for good ones, perhaps, and have been credited with furnishing fresh hints of information, did they appear to be any more than a bare enumeration of the already known and acknowledged differences between the two relations; numbered and contrasted together. But since the case is no otherwise, since the writer shewed himself already apprized of them, and since you have not added to the strength of them, it would have been as well if you had not congratulated yourself so much on the merit of transcription.

These different circumstances, however, though not altogether reconcilable, are not altogether so variable as you intend they should appear. To instance the

* Page 144.

† Page 149.

first in your contrast : you oppose David's being in the wilderness of *Engedi* in one relation, to his being in the wilderness of *Ziph* in the other. While we remain satisfied with names, to be sure *Ziph* and *Engedi* are not the same : nothing can be clearer. But it would be of advantage to your argument to give the distance of these two places ; for in the maps and accounts* of Judea, *Ziph*, *Hachilah*, *Maon*, *Carmel*, and *Engedi*, appear to have been in the neighbourhood of each other. Now in England, where any forest or heath is common to several bordering towns, it will have several local names at each, respectively. It is therefore *more* than probable, that the wilderness between *Ziph* and *Engedi*, might at each place obtain each name ; and be generally known by either. Though David, therefore, is represented at this period, as making several movements†, in the *strong holds* in the wood, &c. they appear to have been within the compass of this wilderness of *Ziph*, or *Engedi*.

Your third reason, in the *Engedi* column, of Saul's being alone and strayed from his men, had been previously denied ‡ by you, and termed a 'silly supposition ;' it therefore cannot now be very wise. The author does not pretend to harmonize any more of them: the identity of place ; the general similitude of the actions ; differing only in relative circumstances ; the small interval of time that must have been between them, occupied only by the story of *Nabal* ; the abrupt introduction of the second relation, after this story, without proper connection ; and the total silence in it of all reference or allusion to a recent adventure so strikingly similar, still seem to argue a strange repetition.

You indeed undertake to account for the entire omission of all reference to the former adventure in the

* Particularly "Wells' Sacred Chronology," vol. III. p. 35, 36. second edit. The maps of Judea, indeed, are very vague, though sufficiently satisfactory as to this point.

† 1 Sam. xxiii. 14, &c.

‡ Page 135.

latter*. But your imputing it to David's *politeness*, and to Saul's consciousness, is not supported by any thing stronger than your *apparent*† persuasion.

David's conduct, while protected by Achish king of Gath, is the next subject of your panegyric. You, Sir, who are as intent upon abusing Saul, as either Bayle, Morgan, or this writer, or an association of all three could possibly contrive to bestow on David; take every occasion to draw parallels between them, resulting constantly in a new imputation on the memory of Saul! In this place you say‡, that according to this writer, 'It was no crime in Saul to do what David did; and he shall pass unreprieved for the same action that shall mark out David as a free-booter and murderer.' You are again to be told, Sir, that you are mistaken (if it really is a mistake) in supposing that the character of Saul was patronised in that little history, Not being the principal object of attention, he was no farther insisted on, than the connection he had with the story, required. With regard to the present question, it is to be noted that Saul, in his expedition against the Amalekites, acted in obedience to that authority, to which in your opinion he was bound to have yielded. David, on the contrary, produces no commission for his inroads on the Amalekites, Gezrites and Gessurites, but appears actuated only with a desire of plunder. You add §, indeed that these three clans were not confederates with Achish, but in a state of hostility with him. It is not supposed that there was any settled amity maintained among these different tribes, but how valid the proofs you have not produced may be, to prove the alleged hostility in question, cannot be determined: what you have cited||, only alludes to the particular *retaliatory* incursions on Ziklag, which was in the land of the Philistines. Had David considered them as enemies to his patron king Achish, tell us, Doctor, why "David saved neither man nor woman

* Page 147.

† Only this once, Doctor?

‡ Page 152

§ Page 153.

|| 1 Sam. xxx. 16.

alive, to bring tidings to GATH, saying, lest they should tell of us, saying, so did David, and so will be his manner, all the while he dwelleth in the country of the Philistines !”

Such; however, was the reason that David gave for his massacre of these poor wretches, which contrary to Scripture and common sense, you say was in reality doing king Achish service.* But his excuse neither agrees with this plea nor with another, which you are kind enough to lend† him: namely, ‘that the Amalekites were many ages before doomed to destruction; and the Gessurites and Gezrites, who were old inhabitants‡ of the land, Canaanites, were commanded to be extirpated by God himself, for such reasons, as renders such a command worthy his character.’

The true cause of the antipathy between these people and the Hebrews, has already been hinted;§ but is the *verbal denunciation* of such cruel dooms by the Creator, agreeable with Prop. III.? The Lord is able to fulfil his own decrees in the ordinary course of his providence, and they are thus less liable to be questioned, that when effected by *men*, evidently interested in such extirpations.

But if we assume the supposition that David, contrary to his own express words, had in view the fulfilment of this old sentence of death; yet it was surely an ill-chosen time for a man persecuted, and just escaped from danger of his own personal safety, to undertake the execution of purposes requiring great power! but this being nevertheless granted to be the case, what meaneth this bleating of sheep, braying of asses, and lowing of oxen? and these camels laden with wearing apparel?¶ Surely David has not been guilty of the crime¶ which Saul is so heavily charged with? Yet this appears to be the case, and is no crime now! So

* Page 153.

† Page 158.

‡ The Doctor is desired to turn to Joshua xiii. 13. or to any other place where the Geshurites are proscribed.

§ See page 31. ¶ 1 Sam xxvii. 9. ¶¶ 1 Sam. xv. 9, &c.

true is that English proverb, that *one man may better steal, &c.*

The expedition being over, David returns to Achish: and to his interrogations where he had been making his inroad, returned him an answer, which you justify and affirm* to be 'true but ambiguous.' Pray, Sir, if it was ambiguous, that is, if it had more meanings than one, what was the precise truth affirmed by it? and if it was rendered ambiguous with intention to deceive the person to whom it was addressed, can it be honoured with the sacred name of truth? Think well before you return an answer. You indeed accuse† him of even too much condescension 'for giving an ambiguous answer to a question, which he was not obliged to give a direct reply to.' But this is no less absurd than all the rest. For, as David obtained an hospitable protection from Achish, he was certainly, in every sense of the word, accountable to his benefactor for his public behaviour, while he remained in his territory.

David is next summoned to perform suit and service to his patron, and march with him and the rest of the Philistine princes to the invasion of Judea, which he had before beguiled Achish into the opinion of his having ravaged himself. To ward off the charge of his compliance, you again bring *ambiguity*‡ to your assistance, the merits of which have already been examined.

You have now, however, no right even to ambiguity, for he actually obeyed! from whence do you infer his insincerity? from the Philistine princes refusing to accept his assistance? this only argues their distrust; as they did not hear his reply to Achish: David's expressions on his dismissal will not bear citing for this purpose. If you think they will, they are entirely at your service. But as it so happens that you cannot deny the fact of his really marching with them, you proceed to argue from suppositions too futile to be seriously attended to. Do not accuse the author of

* Page 153

† Page 154.

: ‡ Page 155.

wanting to smother them, such are to be found in the page of the last reference.

You ask the author* ‘ what a character he himself would have given David, had he betrayed his country for the sake of Achish?’ He replies, from a review of his situation, that David would not have deserved a much better character, had he betrayed his benefactor for the sake of his country.

In short, David was now in such a situation, that it was lucky for him the Philistine commanders concluded he would act treacherously ; (he had, like every one else, a general character, it is to be supposed) for had he not been thus extricated, it was impossible for him to have performed an honourable part, let him have acted how he would. But, as you say ; ‘ fortunately for David, his prudence, gratitude, and integrity, were not put to so severe and difficult a trial.’

While David was absent from Ziklag, in the Philistine army, the Amalekites seized the opportunity of revenging the former injury he had done them ; which, notwithstanding his pious precaution, cannot be supposed to pass without being known, by them at least. Here, because you will not leave this poor author a rag to his back, you will not suffer his remark on the different conduct of David the aggressor, and the Amalekite retorters, to pass unmolested ; though it was too obvious to be unnoticed. David in his inroad, “ smote the land, and left neither man nor woman alive !” The Amalekites, whether actuated by revenge, or only a like disposition to plunder, it avails not ; though you may possibly urge it ; “ slew not any either great or small !” How striking the contrast ! If they came to avenge so savage an insult, it shewed great consideration in them to spare the innocent, the guilty being absent : if they only came on the common thieving principle, the bare comparison of the different treatment of the sufferers in each instance, speaks for-

cibly without amplification. You, Sir, too unguardedly, think proper to lose sight of David's aggression, and enlarge on the heinous nature of the Amalekite proceedings. 'The women and children,' say you,* 'they spared and took captives, not out of compassion and moderation, as this writer insinuates; but because they wanted slaves, either for their own use, or to make money of them, by selling them for slaves to any that would purchase them. And this I should think a greater cruelty than the putting them to the sword, and that the moderation was on David's† side, rather than the Amalekites.'—The author intended here to hint that women captives probably met better fates by being made wives of; but waved it from an apprehension that it might give you an advantage over him by your insisting on the aversion women have to pronounce the word *obey* in the marriage contract, to prove that even this would have been making slaves of them; more especially in the east! However, from the premises you have laid down, it is apprehended that David's treatment of his vanquished enemies,‡ in another instance, had better been left alone by you; since the deaths he is there supposed to have put them to, however shocking they may appear, are thus more moderate than that slavery into which you endeavour§ to moderate them! This is handing him deeper into the mire, under pretence of helping him out. 'What evil genius tempted the man to turn critic!'

You proceed.|| 'I affirm lastly, that he (David) did well in extirpating them (the Amalekites) as they were proscribed by God himself, and condemned to be utterly cut off.' Had David been then in a situation to put such decrees in execution, with respect both to character and ability; had he urged this proscription to authorize the butchery; and lastly, had not plunder been the sole actuating motive, as appears both by the

* Page 160. † Meaning in the consequent pursuit and slaughter.

‡ 2 Sam. xii. 31.

§ Page 187, &c.

|| Page 160

specification of it, and by his alleged reason for the massacre; the massacre might be justified upon Hebrew principles: but from the circumstances of the transaction you are deprived even of them! So that the badness of your reasoning is not at all to be wondered at.

The author is unwilling to ascribe your apologies for Jewish cruelties, to a natural barbarity of disposition in you: it is rather deducible from another source: you have read these annals until blood is familiar to you; and your ideas of right and wrong are absolutely confounded!

This error, however, it might have been hoped the amiable precepts of Jesus Christ would have corrected; but even these are ineffectual antidotes: for you threaten the author with personal peril* for considering this adventure in any other than the accepted light. How different this behaviour is from that of the great founder of the religion you have so long taught, need not be insisted on: it is much too evident!

David's treatment of the Amalekite, who brought him the welcome news of Saul's death, and claimed the merit of it, is agreeable to the customary rules of politics; and has nothing therefore remarkable in it, farther than it was rendered by peculiar circumstances. Saul was said to be rejected by God, and David was the pretender to his throne; it was therefore imagined this man might have had some claim to his private gratitude, especially considering the account the Amalekite gave of the matter. However, it is not insisted on. David's lamentation over Saul, still appears with all the marks of insincerity it did before; his grief for Jonathan, whose love toward him was *wonderful, passing the love of women*, was perhaps suitable: though the figure expressing this love, without any uncharitable inferences, is certainly not well chosen.

On the death of Saul, when David repaired to Hebron, and was there anointed king over Judah; the author had remarked, that he did not seem to claim in right of the sacred unction bestowed on him long since by Samuel: to this you reply,* ‘this is a very injudicious observation; to say the least of it; for David had no other title to the succession, but the appointment of God by Samuel; and this claim on which he founded his pretensions, was universally known to the people of Israel, and the avowed reason why they advanced him to the throne.’ To this it may be answered, that he claimed his title as soon as he could make it out, by the law of force. If his divine title to the Hebrew crown was universally known, and if, as you say, Ishbosheth had none at all,† how came David’s title not to be universally acknowledged? Did only one tribe believe in it? Yet David with the divine grant was obliged to obtain the sovereignty by arms and intrigue! just for all the world, like the wicked, who attain ends by the same means to all external appearance! It is true, Abner at length interested himself in the accomplishment of this grant, but observe, it was not until his zeal was excited by a personal affront relating to a concubine! so that it is doubtful whether he really believed in it or no.

The appellations pretender and usurper, you say,‡ belong more properly to Ishbosheth:—yet there is no irregularity hinted at in Ishbosheth’s succeeding his father; nor any commotion on his accession§; which is rather uncommon under such circumstances.

Your observations on David’s conquest of the city of Jerusalem||, if they prove any thing, prove that you, with the assistance of Hebrew, are as far from ascertaining doubtful points, as the author can be with only plain English.

In treating of the wars of David, you must, though it is hard to know wherefore, drag Saul in again; with

* Page 164.

† Page 165.

‡ Page 172.

§ Except what David excited.

|| Page 173, &c.

whom we now have nothing farther to do. If Saul did wrong, you know he was rejected, and no one will perhaps interest himself in defending his reputation. Yet you take so many occasions to impeach him, that it were as easy to review your History of him, as you have done this of David: be this, however, the task of some one else, and resume we the review of David. Your reason* for supposing David to shew favour to Gath in his wars with the Philistines is not sufficient to establish the fact, or even the extraordinary probability of it; all these people being frequently introduced, after mention of total slaughter: the invasions were partial, and fugitives no doubt returning to their settlements, when the marauders were gone. You are likewise, Sir, very earnest to alter the proportion in which he slaughtered the Moabites†, from two-thirds to one-half: you are extremely welcome to the difference, if it will do David any material service. You alledge, to justify his wars with the Philistines and Moabites, a league‡ among these neighbouring nations against Israel. If so, as may be very naturally supposed, it was a very justifiable compact; Israel being a common enemy, who ravaged them *ad libitum*, not from the common misunderstandings among states, but from an insatiable appetite for blood and plunder.

When you get particular notions in your head, you swell your book greatly with the parade of numerous citations, either dwelling upon, or digressing from, the point in hand, frequently to very little purpose; as may be seen in p. 182, 3, 4, now open before the writer: and in many others.

To palliate David's cruel treatment of the Ammonites, you insist on their king's ill usage of David's ambassadors sent to congratulate him on his accession, after the death of his father. 'Hanum,' say you§, 'instead of receiving them as the ambassadors of so

* Page 178.

† Ibid.

‡ Page 181.

§ Page 185.

great a prince, and sent on so polite and humane an errand, was prevailed on by his princes, to regard them as spies, and treated them with the vilest indignity.'—Ambassadors are spies by the very nature of their employment, but tolerated among states by mutual consent. These, however, were considered as such in a much more particular manner: the princes say to Hanum *, "thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? Hath not David rather sent his servants unto thee, to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it?" Credit these representations with having some foundation in truth at that time; the Jews being a people always to be suspected; and then these ambassadors are but treated accordingly; considering the times.

You are carefully intrenched, Sir, in your expositions; you first endeavour by various trials to alter the meanings of passages: and lest they should fail you, frequently, as in this instance†, attempt a justification of the literal acceptance; arguing again, as in the case of Nabal, an improbable degree of provocation measured from that of the revenge: for you are engaged to defend at all adventures.

Bringing his wars together into one section, you, from justifying his barbarities, proceed to prove him merciful; and remark concerning the civil war headed by Absalom, thus.‡ 'After the civil war between David and Absalom, we read of no bloody executions for treason and rebellion.' The reason, Sir, speaks for itself, though it has escaped your penetration. This revolt was so general, that David was obliged to fly even from his capital: and when it was suppressed, it was immediately succeeded by another, so that David no doubt thought it advisable to sit down contented with his re-establishment. Recrimination at this season would have been scarcely less than a general proscription: and was too hazardous to attempt. This

* 2 Sam. x. 3.

† Page 189. 190. 191.

‡ Page 191.

plea of inability, which you urge for his not calling Joab to account for the murder of Amasa,* is equally valid in the general sense in which it is here applied ; where you would ascribe to his mercy and forgiveness, what flowed from policy, considering the precariousness of his situation.

Following the order in which you have introduced your facts, we now attend to the return of the ark. The strange crime of Uzzah, who, poor man, somehow or other lost his life for his good-nature, is thus considered by you in the ensuing words ;† which will perhaps be made to read, by the introduction of a word or two to render it intelligible. ‘ Doth he (this author) think that the Lord of Hosts, to whom it belonged, could not have saved it, without his (Uzzah) doing what it was absolutely unlawful for him to do ?’ If the Lord would have saved it, because he could, it may in the same manner be argued, that he would have brought it to any place where he intended it to be : and that therefore David was impertinently officious. But with respect to Uzzah, if “ the Lord seeth not as man seeth ; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart ;”‡ the man’s intention was indisputably good ; and the alleged crime surely pardonable : the seeming exigency precluding all hesitation and reflexion. Had the ark been really overturned for want of this careful prevention, Uzzah might with greater plausibility have been smote for his omission, than he was for his commission. But you say, the Levites should have carried it on their own shoulders ; that in their neglecting it, they consulted their ease more than their duty ; and, that this was an offence of no small aggravation.§ Was Uzzah then to be punished for the laziness of the priests ?

You clothe David, in this procession of the ark, in a complete priest’s habit : but David was not a priest,

* Page 195. † Page 197. ‡ 1 Sam. xvi. 7. § Page 197.

either by office or tribe: the ephod it is true, was part of the priest's dress: there were, you know, two kinds, one peculiar to the High Priest; and a common one, worn by the priests in general: but from the case in hand, it is probable it was worn by others on peculiar solemn occasions. David wore one now; together with a robe of fine linen: which, that you may effectually secure him from being liable to the indecencies his wife Michal was witness to, you will have to be the priest's robe, close down to the feet. The linen robe was, as you allow,* put on by David for coolness, and the ephod was probably put over it to give it something of a solemn appearance: but had this robe been *that* robe, which was close round, flowing down to the feet, it would have been very inconvenient for a man dancing "with all his might."

You ascribe the ridicule his wife Michal cast on him to his being divested of his regal attire.† But if, as you say, he appeared as a priest, she would not have scoffed at him in that manner, though you can maintain such a supposition;‡ for we have no other instance of an ill disposition in her, farther than what is generally inferred from this; David had been indebted to her affection for his life:§ neither would she in that case have alluded to the vain fellows who openly uncovered themselves. The parallel would not hold, Sir; unless it were in virtue of your new theory of uncovering,|| which may first adorn these vain fellows with kingly robes; and then by uncovering them, signify the putting them off and the putting on the habits of a priest! If she meant all this, she certainly deserved to be excluded from child-bearing.

When David deprived Mephibosheth of his possessions, on being accused by his steward Ziba; and upon discovery of the calumny appears to have restored him but half the penalty of his supposed guilt, you say,¶ 'there might be reasons of state, reasons of

* Page 199, 200.

† Page 201.

‡ Page 202.

§ 1 Sam. xix. 11—17.

|| Page 128, note.

¶ Page 205.

great prudence and equity, that might induce David at that time, *to give this check to the house of Saul*; especially as Shimei, one of Saul's family, had used him with peculiar marks of indignity, and discovered that they wanted only the opportunity to revenge themselves on him, and place one of Saul's house upon the throne of Israel.'

This is one of your pleas. The might be, however is not to be understood as your real opinion; for here, as in your review of David's treatment of the Ammonites, you rather start a number of suppositions guarded against every judgment that may be formed of a transaction, than seem to have any settled opinion of your own. Thus in the present case, lest the politic check to the house of Saul should fail, you back it with a confirmation of the charge against Mephibosheth, supposed by Mr. Hallet*. Not quite confident of the weight of this opinion, however, you confuse us with a third contained in these words †. 'We have already seen that David, by the original grant, gave the property of the whole patrimony to Mephibosheth, but so as that Ziba, his fifteen sons, and twenty servants, were to be maintained out of it for cultivating the estate; which was a proper division of it between Mephibosheth and Ziba.' If a person undertakes the stewardship of an estate, it is true the estate is understood to subsist him; but what steward was ever understood to divide the estate with his master? Granting however, any division to be made, and the entire property afterwards to be vested in Ziba, on his treacherous slander; by what rule in morals or politics was Ziba continued on the estate, on the original compact, when his villainy was discovered? You affirm indeed ‡, that 'it was not as the reward of his treachery, but out of respect even to Saul, of whose house Ziba was, and as a recompence for that seasonable and noble supply that he brought him (David) when he was forced to

* Page 205, note.

† Page 206.

‡ Page 207.

abandon the capital.— Surely, respect to the house of Saul would have been better shewn by favour to the injured Mephibosheth, than to his servant; especially when that servant proved so vile a traitor! and were the designing kind offices of a traitor to blind all attention to the crime to which they were owing; when that crime was manifested? But having just before supposed this partition intended to give a check to the house of Saul, you here represent it as a deed of respect toward it! You now possibly may have some other exposition of it ready, which you are heartily welcome to supply, if you are so disposed.

You are next, Sir, attended to the memorable story of the unfortunate Uriah! Little need be said by the author respecting this complicated crime of David, as it is condemned in the relation, and therefore by every one beside. Some observations, however, which you have made relating to it, could not be overlooked, and your attention is requested on their account, for a few moments.

Adulterers, as you say, were to be punished with death. True. Will a holy person then, deliberately influence another with him to incur this penalty? Deliberation is insisted on: since had David and Bathsheba been casually together, a sudden gust of passion might, as you say it did*, hurry him away without allowing him time for deliberation. But this was not the case. The temptation was distant, so that, though his passion was fired with the sight, he had not only time for recollection, but was also amply provided with the means of cooling it again, at home. But neither did he make use of either of these opportunities!—he sent and enquired after this woman whom he saw bathing;—found she was the wife of one of his officers, but—nevertheless caused her to be brought to him, as every one knows! Let any impartial person decide what right David has to the excuse of being hurried.

into a precipitate gratification of his passion! and whether this was not a crime ‘peculiarly aggravated by previous deliberate steps!’

Even after all that you have hitherto urged in justification of David’s character, it was thought hardly possible, Sir, for you to extract a compliment to it, out of this greatest acknowledged crime he ever committed! Yet have you address enough to perform it! You trace the necessity of Uriah’s death, as the only means to save the other parties; and then ask*, ‘But how was Uriah to be got rid of? Poison, assassination, or a false charge of treason, or some secret way of destruction, were the methods that the eastern princes were well acquainted with. David was above them all, and had a kind of generosity even in his very crimes. He causes him to fall in the bed of honour, gloriously fighting against the enemies of his king and country.’ Generous David! Incomparable apologist!

“And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the fore-front of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten and die.” What an amiable quality is generosity!

As you esteem David’s delivery of seven of Saul’s posterity to be hanged by the Gibeonites, to be ‘one of the most unexceptionable parts of his behaviour as a king, and an illustrious proof of the generosity of his temper, &c.’† it deserves some examination.

That Saul *might* have injured these Gibeonites, was not denied; so that your reflexions on this supposition‡ are nothing worth. It was then, and is still, thought remarkable, that there was no chronological record of a fact, which after such a length of time demanded an expiation so awfully hinted, and so extraordinary in its circumstances! The history said §, that after many years, God ‘punishes—whom? a whole nation; with three years famine: which, by the bye, was not sent as a punishment neither; but merely as a hint

* Page 210. † Page 215. ‡ Page 224. § Page 74.

‘ of remembrance’—but it was a calamity nevertheless : so that your sneering enquiry whether, as it was not a punishment, it might not be a blessing, or something between both ? * is, like many other archnesses of a similar nature, hardly becoming the character of a doctor in divinity !

Among these is the quibble by which you affect to make the author intend the duration of the civil wars, when he expresses that of the famine†. But away with such children’s play of *make believe* !

There is no reasoning positively about facts so obscurely referred to. ‘ The crime, you say,‡ was enormous and highly aggravated ; a crime, if any could be so, that was—*Deo vindice dignum*,—and which, though the punishment of it was long deferred, through a train of intervening unavoidable circumstance, was nevertheless worthy to be retaliated by providence, upon the first opportunity that was favourable for the purpose.’ In verity, Sir, you make very free with Providence ! What must your notions of Providence be, that can plead a train of intervening *unavoidable* circumstances, as impediments to its operations ; and can represent it as taking the first *favourable* opportunity to resume them ?

A three years famine over a country, to procure the hanging of seven men, may be very reconcileable with your conception of Providence, though hardly with some propositions before laid down : however, the oracle is said to have answered, “ It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he§ slew the Gibeonites.” From this you infer,|| that ‘ The persons employed with Saul in perpetrating these murders, were those of his “ own house.” He thought the destruction of these Gibeonites so popular a thing, as that he was resolved himself, his family, and relations should have the whole credit of it.’ And therefore, unassisted

* Page 222.

† Preface, p. 26. Review, p. 217.

‡ Page 220.

§ Not *they*.

|| Page 221.

either by particular record, or reason, you 'think it is probable, from the choice that David made, that the very persons he gave up were employed in this butchery.* —These are represented† to be 'the two bastard sons of Rispah his concubine, and the five sons of his eldest daughter.'—Here probability decides against you, unless you can account why Saul, who, according to you, resolved that himself and family should have the credit of this action, chose two of his bastards to assist him in it without associating his legitimate sons, particularly Jonathan; an able warrior, in the the commission: and can prove that five of his grandsons were then born, and of an age to lend an hand also. Not to mention the inconsistency of supposing a prince to associate himself and children to commit actions always referred to soldiers as their proper office.

There is, however, another reason why you select Saul's bastard children and grand-children as help-mates in this odd massacre. After establishing that by *the seed* expressed in the oath between Saul and David, the male line is to be understood, as if Saul relinquished all care for the female, you add‡—'But David gave up only the sons of Saul's concubine who were not the legal seed of Saul, and those of his eldest daughter, who could only keep up Adriel's name and not Saul's; and hereby conscientiously observed, without the least violation, his oath to Saul.' Yes, Sir, with the help of that mental reservation in all his expressions with which you so often credit him. The reasons, therefore, appears now, why Saul's bastards and *grandchildren* were so strangely pitched upon by you for his instruments in the massacre, lest your system of expiation should be overturned.

It is to be supposed, Sir, from your continued method of arguing, that you never read of commotions excited in a state by illegitimate children; or by descendants in a female line; else you might possibly have

* Page 221.

† Page 217.

‡ Page 227.

allowed now as you did once before,* that reasons of great prudence '—might induce David to give this check to the house of Saul; as Shimei, one of Saul's family, had used him with peculiar marks of indignity, and discovered that they wanted only the opportunity to revenge themselves on him, and place one of Saul's house upon the throne of Israel.'

Mephibosheth, whom David took care to keep under his own eye, having such a shocking scene to contemplate, might, as he really was, considering his decrepitude, with little hazard be preserved; as an evidence of probity in this pious king. Your table of his decendants†, is of no farther use than as it serves to countenance the declamatory string of ironical scoffing, and panegyric sentences which close this section of your work: since you have no clearer evidence of Mephibosheth having any grandchildren born at that time, than you have to prove that Saul and his grandchildren massacred the Gibeonites.

David's numbering the people, is the next subject for the exercise of your critical powers! The author of the history, after stating the circumstances of this fact, chose to decline any farther discussion of it, as surpassing any abilities he can boast, to reconcile with our present sceptical and depraved conceptions. Now, however, that he is assisted with your mature reflexions, he will hazard a few cursory observations on them.

The translation by comparing two passages together, affirms David to have been moved both by God and Satan, to number his people. You seem to be clear, that it could not be God who tempted him: and as to the Devil you make any body of him, but rather suppose him to have been one of David's courtiers!‡ It is pretty clear that this same courtier was frequently whispering in his royal master's ear. Upon farther enquiry, however, the crime imputed to David on

* Page 205.

† Page 228.

‡ Page 235.

this occasion, was his remitting the head-money always to be paid at such general reviews.* This calls for divine punishment; and who was the proper object for punishment is the question. If we say it is hard, David thus actuated by invisible agency, should suffer as a principal; you reply,† ‘ But doth he not know that a man may be hanged for a crime, to which his indictment says: *he was moved by the Devil*; and because the Devil moved him, is he therefore a passive instrument, and free from guilt? Doth he really think, that the Devil ought to be tried and hanged, instead of the man whom he tempted?’ In answer to these queries it may be hinted, that by human laws we hang the man, because the man perpetrated the fact; but for *God* to punish the instrument of a purpose, confessedly over-ruled to the execution of that purpose by supernatural influence; would be just as if *we* should convict the *knife* or the *pistol* at the Old Bailey, and discharge the criminal! If it appears odd that the people (one remove still farther from the author of the crime) should be punished for the fault of their king; you answer,‡ ‘ Perhaps it may help to set the thing a little even with him [the writer] when I put my reader in mind; that kings are no otherwise to be punished in their regal capacities, nor oftentimes to be brought to correct the errors of their administration, but by public calamities: by famine, pestilence, foreign wars, domestic convulsions, or some other like distresses that affect their people.’—Perhaps it would set the subject still more even, were you to establish this position by authority more convincing than mere *ipse dixit*. Your logic however, is seen in the immediately ensuing words to the former: ‘ and if it be right at all for God to animadvert on the conduct of princes, or to shew his displeasure against them for the public errors of their administration, it must be right and fit for him to

* Page 237.

† Page 236.

‡ Page 238.

afflict their people: and indeed this is nothing more than what continually happens in the common course of providence.'—If then, as you say, from ordinary occurrences, *and from nothing more*, it is evident God punishes and admonishes princes by those occurrences; it is no wonder they profit so little by these lessons given to others, and which they now have no infallible oracle to interpret for them. For, as oracles have been long since discredited, and *therefore* not continued, the common course of providence must either go on in vain, respecting this main purpose of its movement, or else intirely stop.

The opinion of Grotius cited by you,* that *acerbissimum est delinquentibus regibus supplicium id quod populis infligitur*; can be determined only by fact, whether they themselves really think so: and it is pretty evident that Grotius was not a king.

You have, however, other causes to urge for this pestilence; namely,† that it might be a judgment on the people for not remonstrating against the numeration crime of their king; or for their not pressing the payment of the capitation tax, though not demanded of them; or for their other transgressions! In truth, there is no end of following you through all your shifts, turnings and windings: these suggestions being your own, and no crime being charged on the people in the Bible, the writer does not think himself under obligation to be farther troubled with them.

As to Nathan the prophet, he was certainly nettled at the slight put on him, and some others; in not being invited to Adonijah's feast: else he would not have insisted on that circumstance: which had better been waved. You have been at some pains to render the supposition ridiculous, but the probability of Nathan's being corrupted, was not surely less than that of David's sons;‡ who yet all of them, except Solomon, (who, had he been invited, had some private reasons

* Page 239, note..

† Page 239.

‡ 1 Kings i. 9. 19. 25.

to the contrary, which their proceedings shew them to have been aware of) were agreeable to settling the succession on their elder brother; though certainly as much interested in the disposal of the kingdom as Nathan could be.

It must be owned, that you have fairly caught the writer off his guard, when he quoted a verse from a psalm, which happened not to be the production of David. It was in the collection under his name and was carelessly pitched on without due thought of the general tenor of it. *Humanum est errare*, Doctor, and though you have here an advantage *over the writer*, it can be converted to but small use toward a general exculpation of David; and inaccuracies of expression still less so: though by you greatly insisted on.

You plead,* that 'there are so many traces of a benevolent spirit in David's conduct and psalms, as leave little room for the accusation of his being of a rancorous and implacable spirit even to his worst enemies, for whom he frequently prayed; and to whom he often rendered good for evil.'—The benevolence of David's conduct has been sufficiently examined into, and the good which he returned to his enemies, reasoning from his conduct, was most probably confined wholly to *his prayers*; like the mercy of the Holy Courts of Inquisition.

The book of psalms being a collection of various composition, many of which have no name prefixed to them, and their expressions so general; little positive can be affirmed about them: at least, if we attended to commentators, among whom we might hope to find agreement, and therefore from whom, if from any, we might expect to gain satisfaction.

Many of those ascribed to David do not, however, warrant your character of them; and there is no arguing against facts to ward off the charge of inconsistency.

But, say you,† 'it should be remarked, that in the

* Page 254.

† Page 253,

far greater number of those places, where there appear to be direct imprecations in our version, there are none in the original;* in which the verb is in the future tense, instead of the imperative; and so is only declarative of what should be the consequence, instead of the Psalmist's wish of what he would have it be.' What a strange translation then are we amused with, if this is universally the case! and if the meaning of the psalms is so injuriously perverted, how can we pretend even to guess at the meaning of any other part? And yet, Doctor, the *acceptance* and *use* of our translation through so many generations of Hebrew critics, seem to argue its imperfections not to be quite so gross as, for the sake of your hero, you now choose to represent them.

This argument, though it may be thought sufficient of itself, if established, to clear David from the charge of vindictiveness; yet, as in other cases, you are careful to provide against its failing you, by urging the wickedness of David's enemies, to countenance his bitter denunciations against them; and refer us to David for a character of them.† But it is hardly fair to accept any person's character of his enemy; since resentment makes us see through a wrong medium. The expressions in which wickedness is imputed to these people in the psalms, flows naturally enough from a people who esteemed themselves a nation peculiarly favoured by God; but ought to be looked upon rather as expressive of their own superiority in that respect, and hatred and contempt for their neighbours, than as indications of the real wickedness of these people.

But, you say, no charge of barbarity can lie against

* You refer particularly to the 109th Psalm; as 'a most remarkable instance:' other Hebrew critics, however, say that those contained in that psalm *are imprecations*; but that they are only there related by David as those of his enemies on him! What therefore, in the name of criticism, are they?

† Page 252.

David for many descriptive passages of the horrors of war in his Psalms : * for that, if this author wishes his country success against its enemies, he wishes destruction to them, which destruction is attended with all those calamitous consequences mentioned by David. True, Sir, very true ; but then it shews a propensity to cruelty to *dwell so minutely* , and with seeming pleasure, upon circumstances of horror in our songs, like the North-American Indians ; which a humane generous mind feels pain in thinking of, and is pleased with being relieved from.

Your next apology for David respects his behaviour to Shimei. You tax him with false accusation against David, in calling him *a bloody man* : it being, as you observe, before the affair of the Gibeonites : asking † ‘ in what other respect could David be guilty of the blood of Saul’s house ? ’ Sir ! he took up arms against Saul, in virtue of a claim to supersede him : he associated with, and promised assistance to, the enemies of his country ; by whom Saul and three of his sons perished : he contested the dominion with Ishbosheth, whom he harassed to the grave. Foundation sufficient to charge him with guilt of the blood of Saul’s house. But you add, ‡ that Shimei ‘ retracts all he had said, owns himself a slanderer and a liar, and begs pardon for his abusive impudence. ’ He did so, and upon the change in the fortune of David, is in that as justifiable in point of prudence, as he was censurable before in point of rashness. To give David the disinterested merit of sparing his life, you ask, § ‘ what there was in the season to prevent David from punishing a treasonable reviler as he deserved ? ’ Enough ! David was rather in a disagreeable plight at that time, and Shimei a man of some consideration ; as appears afterward : both which considerations rendered it unadvisable to silence this brawler then.

Consequences proving that in David’s oath there

* Page 249.

† Page 261.

‡ Page 262.

§ Page 266.

would need some equivocation to excuse him in his dying charge to Solomon; you limit the extent of the obligation he laid himself under, to the day in which he made it*: from which you establish that David violated no oath, if he actually ordered Solomon to put him to death. But, Sir, probity is greatly wounded by such excuses. *Tantum religio potest suadere!*

To justify David still more in this instance, you paraphrase his order to Solomon, making him say†—‘clear him not, therefore, as I did, *if thou findest him guilty of any male practices*; but his hoar head bring down unto the grave with blood’—But there appears no conditional clause in David’s speech, the injunction is positive. However, as you love amplifying, the author will supply a far more suitable paraphrase of that part of his speech, as follows:—‘It is true, I promised not to put him to death, but thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do: thou knowest thyself not to be bound by that obligation; therefore his hoar head, &c.’—which is far more explanatory of his right meaning.

You confirm your paraphrase, from Solomon’s different treatment of Joab and Shimei. You allow the injunction to be positive respecting Joab, because he immediately put him to death; whereas he only confined Shimei to Jerusalem, under the penalty of death‡. But this was owing to a different cause. Joab, by joining the party of Adonijah, had furnished that pretence, which Shimei does not appear to have done§; notwithstanding you have asserted his readiness to join any measures to disturb David’s government||. Joab, therefore, was assassinated, and Shimei watched. The writer has the satisfaction to find his opinion not discountenanced by the learned Houbigant, in the passage you have quoted¶. *EXPECTAVIT Solomon de-*

* Page 272. † Page 268. ‡ Page 270. § 1 Kings i. 8.

|| Page 268. You here indeed suppose him to have been in Absalom’s rebellion, but this is unsupported by any authority excepting your own.

¶ Page 269, note.

nec Semei reus esset, ut eum morte plecteret: and he took care not to lose the first specious pretence to effect it.

Were it possible to establish the doctrine of temporal judgments from those instances, wherein the chance medley* of human occurrences has fulfilled the *lex talionis*; the case of Joab might certainly be produced as evidence: that assassination, by which he cut off Abner and Amasa, being at length his own lot! You say†, ‘I allow David’s dying order in this instance to be peremptory and absolute.’ From what premises do you allow it? your allowance can only be drawn, without due consideration, from Solomon’s conduct in obedience to this notable testament. It is, however, a condescension not to be overlooked; since, in granting one to be absolute, you grant the other also; the terms dictating each, being equally strong; nay, almost in the very same words.

After mentioning Joab’s crimes, David proceeds: “Do therefore according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace.”

After his accusation of Shimei, and giving his son the reason why he had not put him to death himself, he adds: “Now therefore hold him not guiltless; for thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him; but his hoar head bring thou down to the grave with blood.”

Joab, however, though far from being a good man, yet on the whole deserved a better legacy from David. His services had been long and important; and though concerning his killing the false Abner, you not only charge him with revenge for his brother’s death, but allege‡ his probably envying him the glory of settling David on the throne of Israel: yet this admits of a doubt. For he was apprehensive of a different consequence; and hearing that Abner had been with David, expostulates§ with him on the imprudence of

* Matthew v. 45. Luke xiii. 4.

† Page 273.

‡ Page 274.

§ 2 Sam. iii. 24, 25.

trusting such a man among them: saying, "he came to deceive thee, and to know thy going out and thy coming in, and to know all that thou dost." Probably Joab did not know the story of the concubine. He therefore appears (uniting his revenge with the deed) to have acted basely for David's service.

Joab was really ill used in the affair of Amasa: which yet is not said to exculpate him. Even here, however, he confined his resentment to his rival: and though he must be justly provoked at David's ingratitude, yet he still continued faithful to his king. His defection at last may perhaps admit of being interpreted into a patronization of that particular plan for the succession, rather than into a rebellion against the superannuated monarch.

David in his lamentation for Abner, had declared the Lord to be the rewarder of the evil doer*: by this expression referring the punishment of Joab to the Lord. Having, therefore, enjoyed the benefit of Joab's services through his life, he having been his right hand all along; gratitude, after such a long attachment, ought to have influenced him to have then left him to that justice of God; and not have bequeathed him death as a legacy for his long friendship!

The panegyric at the close of your Review, on the piety of David, is little worth, after the discussion of the foregoing points. That part of it insisting on his always adhering to the religion of his country†, is still less so; a bad man not being an honour to any religion. No convulsive argument for his goodness can be drawn from his poetic compositions‡, experience proving the best poets to be frequently very far from being the best men.

You, Sir, and the world, now see the authorities and principles from which the History of the Man after God's own Heart was deduced; which in a second edition, may possibly appear still less liable to objec-

* 2 Sam. iii. 39.

† Page 282.

‡ Page 283.

tion in particular places : and an appeal is hazarded to the candid, even of all persuasions, whether it merits the verbose abusive character* you have given it : as ' putting forced constructions on particular passages ; invidious insinuations, where there is nothing in the history to support them : improbable suggestions to eke out facts, or supply the place of them ; false assertions, contrary to the truth of history, to furnish matter for calumny and reviling ; in a word, all methods contrary to truth and honour, and inconsistent with the rules of humanity, candour and justice.' What may be your latent motive for throwing out such inflammatory expressions is left to yourself to brood on ; but unless they had been better supported in point of verity, they are not very indicative of the gentleman, not to mention you by any other character.

It has been urged, that this writer has but revived old objections long since refuted. It is true, that such of them as have appeared before, have been often replied to ; but a reply does not necessarily imply a refutation. Objections of this nature have been replied to from the beginning, and are likely so to be to the end : and what is worthy noting, many dogmas are now exploded, the objections to which have heretofore been thought to be entirely refuted !

You have been pleased, Sir, to attribute to the writer a latent intention of subverting the Gospel constitution † : and have indeed framed an ingenious chain of deductions for that purpose ; which however will not be employed, unless by yourself. The Lord Jesus Christ, it is true, is frequently termed *the son of David* : but with what degree of propriety yourself shall judge. You establish ‡, that—' the seed is always reckoned by the males, and not the females of a family, and (that) the name in a father's house could only be preserved by the male decendants.'—in

* Page 205. † Preface, page 20. ‡ Review, page 227.

which respect Jesus Christ was *not* a son of David * : therefore this connection is destroyed.

The doctrines of Christianity, especially the preceptive ones, taken from his own mouth, cannot to all appearance be affected by insisting on the character of David, whether good or bad ; right sorry would this author be if they rested on any such dependance. The tendency of these doctrines is so manifest ; and many of them are so refined in their own nature, that they will ever claim the most exalted reverence from mankind, to them and to their publisher, independent on all foreign contingencies, on all former narrow tenets, and superstitious rites : which he has so totally superseded among his professors : and that they ever may, is the sincere prayer of this abused writer.

He therefore hopes an acquittal from this part of his indictment.

Who this writer is †, does not concern the dispute ; he does not remain concealed from any consciousness of deserving the reproaches you have scattered in the dark ; but because it is rather inconvenient for objectors and enquirers to declare themselves, while any are liable to be inflated with that holy zeal (not according to knowledge) with which orthodox writers labour to puff them up. He never before was so inadvertent as to run his head into a wasp's nest, and does not perceive the least inclination ever again to repeat the

* Matthew i. 18, &c.

† The author, through misinformation from persons whom he had all reason to credit, was induced to publish an advertisement reflecting on a gentleman in Worcestershire, falsely accused of industriously claiming the production of *the History*. This report, like all other reports grew, from the circumstance of that gentleman being known to have a manuscript by him, on the same subject, and of the same nature. The writer having received full satisfaction as to this point, takes the present opportunity to acknowledge it : and to ask that gentleman's pardon for being misled by reports which certain persons are ever ready to propagate, to the prejudice of the *proscribed*.

experiment : but the humane can never surely blame him for endeavouring to heal the stings he has already received ; and he has the pleasure to assure them, that the smart is entirely subsided.

Religious contest is most disagreeable of all others : since it has ever been least decisive ; and most incentive of those propensities which the genuine dictates of pure religion directly tend to suppress. The writer therefore, at the same time that he drops this controversy, has no present intention ever more to engage in any of the like nature.

With regard to you, Sir ! the author, by whom you have dealt so sharply, retains not the least trace of resentment on that account : he is too well acquainted with the nature of religious zeal, not to make allowances for the violence of its operations, even in the most worthy breasts. Fatal indeed to mankind is the violence of it, wherever it extends itself, and infects the government of a country ! He is only sorry that you reduced him to the necessity of recriminating in a manner in which personal regard could not be preserved. But he, nevertheless, hopes you will have the charity to believe his assurance that, with the greatest esteem for your learning and character,

He remains, your sincere,

March 12, 1762.

Though unknown Friend.

inscript

POSTSCRIPT.

SINCE writing the foregoing letter, the author has read a Vindication of David, in the name of Dr. Thomas Patten, of Oxford. This reverend gentleman is for having the character of King David protected by the authority of the clergy in convocation.* A very ill-judged hint, to say no worse of it: and far from being capable of answering the purpose of this mistaken writer. The character of King David would have remained in as good a situation if Dr. Patten had excused himself this labour: for, notwithstanding his addressing it to his Grace of Canterbury, notwithstanding the assistance of a superabundance of staring capitals; it is doubtful whether the one or the other will stamp a currency on opinions above the standard of their intrinsic value.

His weakness is in no instance more apparent than in his contemptuous mention of the English dissenting ministers. The historian, he says,† ‘Pretends to offer his performance to the public under the notion of a vindication of his late Majesty from the insult which, as he contends, hath been offered to his memory by some reverend panegyrists, *so he stileth certain dissenting teachers*, who it seems have been fond of com-

* Patten, page 3.

† Page 25.

paring him with King David; 'a monarch' saith he, 'in no respect resembling him.'

This gentleman, among other needful information, is to be told, that these dissenting teachers are a very respectable body of men: men whose studies are more suited to their profession, and whose improvement in them have in general manifested them deserving the epithet *reverend*, as much, to say the least, as many collegians, himself in particular; who (bigots to establishment) fondly conceive all sense and learning confined within the limits of universities.

All that is contained in this pamphlet worthy notice, will be found considered in the foregoing letter; indeed some advantages might be gained here if attended to, of no small importance: such as his supposition that the Jewish prophets might perhaps have had no subsistence but from providential presents for their intelligence:* see how Doctors can differ! his comparison of David to Shakspeare's Macbeth † 'whose circumstances were somewhat similar to those of David:' his judicious and delicate comparison‡ between reasoners in religion, and urine doctors! his mistake in the price of admission into the worshipful Robin Hood Society, which is a halfpenny more than he has affirmed it to be: || all these, and many more which might be specified, would furnish a commentator with sufficient matter for animadversion. But it is lost labour to argue with a divine who, through the whole tenor of his performance, has taken professed pains to shew that he is not a protestant upon protestant principles: who, on the least appearance of difficulty in exposition, continually holds up the authority of a letter as yet unsettled, to crush the exertions of private judgment! a

* Page 34.

† Page 162.

‡ Page 127.

|| Page 130, note. Possibly a penny, since the late rise of porter.

a conduct, which will support the exploded doctrine of Transubstantiation? We shall never convince unbelievers by methods which even a Mussulman may adopt in justification of his persuasion.

From these premises, the writer declines the second task of analysing the contents of this vindication. Since, having undergone the toil of examining a far more elaborate work,* he will not spend more time on a person, who, like the frog in the fable, after much puffing and straining, fancies himself an ox!

After what has been pleaded against the charges contained in the most capital performance on the defensive side of this dispute, it is hoped that the Rev. Messrs. Porteus and Cleaver, will not continue to think this writer *quite* so unfair and abandoned as they have represented him to be.

The greatest instance of moderation and generosity of mind on the part of King David, is to be seen in a candid pamphlet just published, under the title of 'The Conversion of a Deist.' In some general reflections at the end of this piece, Mr. Harwood, the writer, takes occasion to insist strongly on the necessity of distinguishing between what is Christianity, and what is not†: in order to the burning without ceremony those loads of hay and stubble under which profane hands have overwhelmed the Christian religion: as our undiscerning zeal for some peculiar nostrums does but rivet prejudices the stronger against it. 'Who, for instance,' says he, 'that valued his character as a rational and well-instructed Christian, would sit down to vindicate David from every charge advanced against his moral character in the late celebrated History of

§ It is probable from more tokens than one, that Dr. Patten has condescended sometimes to plow with Dr. Chaudler's heifer.

† Page 71.

the 'Man after God's own Heart?' Now, however, this gentleman differs from the writer of that history, in some points, it is hoped that by this time, whatever may be ascribed to his ignorance, he will be acquitted of malice; with which all animadverters unite to accuse him: and he sincerely rejoiced to find Mr. Harwood join with him in considering Christianity as entirely unconcerned in this dispute.

"What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" 2 Cor. vi. 14.

THE END.

